
SUMMER CAMP

Point Reyes, California

Summer 2011

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THE LETTER

“The word revolution itself has become not only a dead relic of Leftism, but a key to the deadendedness of male politics: the revolution of a wheel which returns in the end to the same place; the revolving door of a politics which has liberated women only to use them and only within the limits of male tolerance.”

—A. Rich

We were, at first, excited to participate in spaces that we thought might be less oppressive than that of the world we all come to refer to with self-righteous contempt as “normal.” We felt a sense of liberation. We felt urgent. We studied, we built theory, we initiated and participated in actions, we got arrested, we partied. Our alienation seemed to begin a process of disintegration. The personal was political. All friendship was political. It was just what we’d been looking for.

Most of us experienced these communities from the position of an external orbit, although we were at first unable to identify this periphery as gendered. Or, if we were able, we were seemingly alone in this identification. We were, individually, actively pushed out, away from a nucleus of male informed theory, practice and leadership (whether it was called leadership formally or simply operated as such unofficially) by men whose every action reproduced patriarchal arrangements.

Nonetheless, we were driven to be a part of this activity. This desire, if not yet articulated, was somehow familiar. We had known it, somewhere, our whole lives. We had felt the consequences of male-held power since we were children. We may have been unable to name it, we may have been resistant when it was named, but still we knew it. We knew what it meant to have our own power, but to have our wielding be constricted. Even if we were at first unable to articulate these experiences politically, they were in us.

We built a variety of relationships with men—intellectual, social, for some of us sexual. We significantly added to the formulation of theories (even though our conditions were not reflected in them). We wanted in.

Inevitably, our dissatisfaction begins to pull at us. We are, however, conditioned to ignore its calling and we do. If we are white, if we have not already experienced the demarcations of race and class, it may take longer for us to recognize. We are unable to participate in our reading groups. We find ourselves intellectually venerated only when in opposition to another political woman whose theories and practice challenge the mostly male tendencies. We are ignored if we don't offer or lead with our sexuality upon introduction. We are sexually assaulted by men whom we call comrades. And if we publicize these considerations, we are systematically shut out of what little spatial and intellectual access we have been allotted.

When we demand an exploration regarding methods of militant maneuvering within patriarchy, methods of resistance within its omnipresence, we are shut down and labeled with the moniker of identity politics. When we propose patriarchy as a system that weaves itself with and tethers itself to capitalism and white supremacy, we are systematically shut out. And when we demand an acknowledgement of how patriarchy is manifested in our very

relationships—emotional, intellectual, sexual—we are met with silence. The silence, left untended, simmers, boils over into derision.

Our burgeoning consciousness curves outward and then back in, sharply: like a blade, slicing through what we thought we had, creating a fissure, revealing systemic insecurities; and in the same moment, unbeknownst to us, makes room for something new to grow.

At first, we are filled with anger and we don't know where to put it. And so it navigates toward its systemically ordained destination: ourselves. We ask if we are intelligent enough. We question our desirability. We wonder whether our experiences are politically valid. We wonder if we are making too much of things. We calculate schemes for receiving male affirmation. We admonish ourselves for being passive, as if it were an ailment, as if we could be heard if we just spoke loud enough, with enough authority, as if our will alone were enough to rectify our peripheral existence.

And then, if we are lucky, we find each other.

And then?

We commiserate, we begin to find our barricades, we plot, we fight, and through these actions, we find new terrain on which to struggle. Most importantly, we begin to find ways of existing without the affirmation of males: not because we hate anyone with a dick, but because we know that to get strong, to become militant again, to figure out how to be okay, we need an environment composed of political allies rather than reactionaries.

We realize it was with disappointment that we found ourselves surrounded by those professing a benign anti-patriarchal stance while simultaneously asserting their unwillingness to destroy their structural positions (along with our own) or to even begin

to develop a rigorous critique of patriarchy. Without a historical material basis for doing so, their attempts could have only been symbolic. We began to organize autonomously.

What precedes is a description of one particular aspect of our experiences in Brooklyn over a period of a year and a half. We know this isn't everything. We know this is just one piece of so many varied realities. We write to you, because we've heard rumors and whispers that women across the country have been responding to similar and diverging occurrences. We feel something incredible bubbling and rising to the surface. But hearsay and intuition are not enough. Some of us have found each other in Brooklyn. This too is not enough—is never enough. We want to acknowledge the breadth of our actions, widen our networks, and actively work in solidarity.

We want to know what you're doing, thinking, and we want to get together. You are invited to join us for a feminist summer camp, to take place in Northern California from Friday, July 1st to Tuesday, July 5th, 2011.

So we ask:

Where are your barricades?

What are your fights?

And, how do you struggle?

xx,

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A PREFACE FOR SUMMER CAMP ATTENDEES

REGARDING *GENDER REMAINS AND AUTONOMY AND THE NEED FOR LOVE*

I think these might be strange texts to ask you all to read, as they are both fairly personal and disregard many of the conventions of theoretical writing. Or rather maybe I'd hoped they might be strange, and it is this hope that informs my feeling that they merit preface.

First for the sake of comprehensibility: *Gender Remains* was intended originally only for my friends in Bloomington. Most of the ideas for the essay and the attempt it makes were considered collectively, specifically by myself and one other, in response to a sudden flurry of activist activity at home this past winter. Though I think that it contains ideas which are separable from this context, I don't suggest we read it for the 'pure' ideas it may or may not convey.

I would say the same thing about Melandri's piece, though its context is immeasurably less familiar to me. Melandri was an odd

and apparently dynamic character in feminist experimentation of the 70s in Milan; at least, the persistence of texts, along with her own abilities for authorship, place her in the center of particular practices, specifically of the development of a rigorously feminist psychoanalytic practice.

What I'm trying to emphasize is that I don't mean to present these texts for the sake of discussing and debating their content. Though I'm not averse to this possibility, I wouldn't assume that it would be interesting for anyone else, given the specificity of the texts' meaning and their lack of pretension towards 'theoretical coherence'. Rather, I mean to offer them up as examples of tendencies. Having done this, my intention now, in these last few weeks before summer camp, is to figure out how to frame theoretical and personalpolitical discussion of the complications of taking any tactic towards the impossible end of 'autonomy'. If these texts spark any ideas for you they will be more than welcomed.

THE CITY BURNS, GENDER REMAINS

A DECENT ATTEMPT AT ENGAGEMENT

We've resolved to stop working on 'projects' that don't directly implicate gender. What this means in a positive sense we shall, momentarily, leave aside: right now, sitting in an empty Milwaukee apartment on strike from a university occupation, in a kind of exile from another town upturned by the sudden appearance of a bill-as-strategic-opening, it feels necessary to describe how we've come to this point.

Maybe we were being naive. Hearing reports from friends in Milwaukee that large protests here and in the capitol have evinced real potential social unrest... being unable to imagine that this could entail anything substantially different from usual political machinations... deciding to come anyway, just to see for ourselves... But hadn't we known what to expect? In many ridiculous ways, events here have exceeded our expectations. Maybe it will seem obfuscating to use these situations as a lens for envisioning what we want back home, but in nearly every instance comparisons so readily presented themselves that the pull of the last few days' experience inevitably informs our conclusions.*

* Let's be honest—we do not mean to even attempt a fair portrayal of recent events in Milwaukee. How could we feign sincere engagement with situations and people strange to us, when what is explicitly at stake is the satisfactory articulation of

One of the strangest moments was finding ourselves suddenly sitting in a shoddy circle of folding chairs, participating in a meeting meant to produce the logistics of making a university occupation out of an SDS planned walk-out/march/rally against the Wisconsin government's much debated austerity measures. Whoa. Though someone called early on for an elaboration of intentions—still for the sake of better deciding logistics—these were spoken of directly only once, leaving many underlying questions haunting the background. And the big one: fucking why? Everyone was talking about which building, and whether they should lock the doors, how they could herd the crowd and how they could keep people around. The working assumption was that there might be thousands of students and university employees present. We finally pushed someone to articulate it: “when 3,000 students walked out a couple weeks ago, the crowd just milled around all afternoon in a field in the cold doing nothing—people didn't know what to do.”

What we mean here to implicitly criticize is *not* the attitude towards people—fuck humanism and fuck those sheep too!—nor even the vanguardist perspective of being graced with insight which begs to be handed to the masses, but rather simply to point out the seemingly automatic enticement of it all. 3000 meant exciting, something which presents itself in obvious need of response... but why? As the chatter continued, despite or maybe due to everyone now talking even more explicitly about their intentions to direct the crowd, this why? became suffocating. Not that there might have been more sustaining answers! Rather, breathing got hard as it became increasingly apparent that there already *were* reasons, which in their self-evidence wouldn't or *couldn't* be articulated as such. In these same mo-

our own experiences back home? We had initially imagined that only friends in Bloomington would have any reason to read this. Still, if you're reading now and feel involved by our blatantly self-interested use of the UWM occupation, we would understand and would certainly be happy to respond. Also, we had an objectively great time in Milwaukee.

ments we realized that our feelings weren't at all unfamiliar. We wondered, would a similar scenario play out any differently in Bloomington? All the next day, as the occupation was negotiated with members of SDS, we wondered. But inside, really, we already knew.

This is a story about the persistence of the self-evident, about meaning and how it permeates us. Despite the distance implied above, the aloofness of the sentiment 'we already knew', by 'us' I do mean to say both you and me.^{*} I certainly don't mean to brag about our miniscule part in a crushing overdeterminism, rather I mean to acknowledge how we are always already involved in hegemonic meaning-making processes, and, since this is also a story about our feelings, I was simply indicating how this involvement often feels: the ability to say 'we already knew' is not some gift, nor would I want to give it to you. This epistemological consideration deserves more details, but until these feel sayable we must run the risk of both over and underemphasizing our own gritty materiality—this potential overemphasis being the impetus for writing anything at all, and this underemphasis being the consequence of putting off speaking to 'how we know what we say we know'. Still we will persist in telling our story from a decidedly self-important stance—that we might name and engage with the all-consuming forces of gender and politics, and this from the inside.

Even as smug insiders, we would readily admit that of course what we really want is 'something else'. Though we hesitate to

^{*} This essay has a pronoun problem which I have run out of energy to address. Sometimes 'we' means me and friends in Bloomington, generally it means at least me and my original co-author, and in these times I often like to imagine that it might speak to a few other friends' experience as well, though I wouldn't want to fully encompass anyone—not even myself. But of course, when 'we' and 'I' refer to specific perspectives, these have to be owned up to: as I am the only one who actually wrote the text in this version, both 'we' and 'I' are, ultimately, me. I hope that 'we' never refers to humanity, and indeed I was never thinking bigger than myself and particular people in Bloomington. As a consequence, 'you' probably only means you if you would include yourself in this group.

seek any justificative destiny in our anguish, right now, in the intensity with which we imbue the present, we can't imagine that we will ever see the world any differently: a world predicated on meaning/power, the weight of which prompts our flight to the limits of abstract thought, which is no haven, the only vaguely redeemable ideas of which are destruction and creation. We anticipate dreaming in these ideas until they finally fade into the same shade of impossible and we are ready to embrace the world's end. Until then, though, we fantasize that there might still be some interesting nuances to this most worldly dynamic.

Funny how 'interesting' can equally imply hope or doom. I suppose for me it means 'worth noting', and I might have simply said 'tragic'. In this our little tragedy, we are doubly damned. We are damned, of course, in our desires for different meanings, the creation of which might literally be impossible, but we are damned as well in our hatred of existent meanings. Though it feels somehow easier to accept the possibility of destruction than that of creation, we don't mean to bolster our arguments with such tacit and relatively unfounded acceptance. Is negativity really any more workable than positivity? At least in this instance, there is no gratifying way to generalize the deconstruction of existent meanings. And then, with our necessary but particular abstractions and our conflation of multiple experiences, mostly generated after-the-facts, we might be even more susceptible to, in the end, having said nothing.

As the self-evident with its sticky meaning slowly eats away at our ability to consider trying anything at all, we know that it is not really towards some end, but only out of love for ourselves and also for you all that we write now. Despite our hesitations, we've written you, our friends in Bloomington, a thesis: **we have been distraught by the powerful and inarticulate functioning of politics here these past few months. We would like to suggest that it is 'people' and 'importance' which have been most**

insidiously central to these recent manifestations of your attempts to engage the world, and that these are also necessary for the functioning of every existent politics. This ‘people’ and this ‘importance’ preclude other conceptions of people and importance; any meaning that is able to persist is thoroughly gendered. Though sometimes we might hint at another politics, really we’re primarily trying to give shape to the crazy we’ve been feeling, since visiting Milwaukee but much more so since that night that some of us decided to start treating SB590* as an opening for intentional collective activity.

CONCERNING PEOPLE

‘People’ is a most fundamental category, so very generative, so very generated. Its history is no less imbued with power than that of the subject. It is put to such persistent use that any representational usage attempting purity is tainted, and I honestly can’t imagine what could be ‘objectively’ signified by the word. Linguistically, anyway, its meaning is already shored up against the personal. Relying as well on the construction public/private, sexually, it is always a gendered/gendering force. Emotionally, it is so grand and alluring. Psycho-somatically, no matter if consciously or subconsciously, irrationally or not, it always effectively invokes ‘other’: whether in the ‘we’ of Nazis and populists alike, or in the ‘them’ of the revolutionary-minded person’s exploited, or in the implicit ‘we’ of the insurrectionary anarchist’s subversive tendencies, it is actually constituted by lack. In a world populated by such a people, all potential action and every imaginable idea is already contaminated with a certain politics. We can’t say in any more general sense what is the most damning quality of an attempt to make use of the category ‘people’.

* SB590 is an anti-immigration bill that, at the time of this writing, was being debated in the Indiana legislature. Its most threatening clause enjoined any cop having any manner of law-enforcement interaction with anyone they suspect might be an illegal immigrant to demand proof of citizenship.

Specifically too, we're not sure that we are able or want to say what are the dangers, in terms of outcomes, of any particular people-centered position, because we wouldn't care to argue merely for another outcome. Rather, we are often left with questions which we would like to cultivate some ability to pose. As for example in Milwaukee: what if the whole thing were a meaningless void? What if all those thousands of people being out in a crowd weren't an obviously interesting or good or exciting sign, maybe rather even the opposite? Why think that these massive protest situations, including what happened in Madison, are particularly momentous occasions with some different kind of potential? But more than anything, are they really even worth noticing? I don't mean to suggest that such questions are politically useful, that they might lead us closer to some truth and provide a basis for more effective praxis, that these and by implication an endless series of questions are 'important'. All that feels significant and certain is emotionally and self-centeredly so. I like these questions because we can not honestly assess them without some attempt to distance our feelings from the enticement wrought by a social that we otherwise know we can't believe in.

Though imagining a possibility for distance is comforting indeed, we know that any genuine attempt at deconstruction will have to get a lot more messy. To take a weary step towards involving ourselves more, we would like to posit that in Milwaukee we saw the playing out of a few metaphysical presuppositions. One of these involved a particular conception of political power, the power of the people, which utilizes an idea of the world as being the interplay of forces—to be measured, of course, by various accounts of strength. Regardless of philosophy's complications (fuck yeah everybody loves Foucault) and despite an avowed and probably real hatred of SDS 'Maoists', it felt like this basic idea must have been at work—or at least it found expression—in visions for the protest-takeover. We won't get much more specific here, but what this potential deconstruction points to is

that what we want is not simply counter-hegemony, and that we don't want anything to do with a people which is the end result of some additive function of individuals, which function produces power/meaning. For us, the anarchists' position seemed indistinguishable from the Maoists we later met. For them this parallel seemed insubstantial because they wanted lots of people to do something interesting rather than something boring. What was most distressing had little to do with the strategy or intention I surely and actively just misrepresented, but spiraled around the abysmal nature of this 'lots': it carried implicit meaning, and for me implicit in this meaning was the justification for counting bodies. But us is people too, and people is not just masses, or it might ontologically be something truly different. If people couldn't be massed... isn't this a nicer first vision, if we must have one, for the world?

Due to the different context, in Bloomington we've (now 'we' most often will mean you all and us) only ever been talking hypothetical masses. Lately these are often considered as ostensibly identifiable but still oh so amorphous groups (namely, immigrants and students) or as the implicit subject in the oft-stated desire for 'shit to get crazy', though of course our town lends itself to getting a lot more specific than this, too.* In fact, the funny thing is that most of our friends here know so well that grandeur is a trap, which is something I really enjoy about Bloomington life; when we were talking about holding a public assembly it was predicted that 40 people would come, and no one lamented it. Yet despite this reputedly more mature lack of fixation on numbers and our ability to be ironically distant while doing activist projects, for us the persistence of a meaning-laden 'people' has been no less determinant.

* Let us not forget the days when we used to fashion spreadsheets of landowners' positions and talked seriously about compiling a rolodex of acquaintances in town and their interests in 'highway resistance'. I recall this shamelessly, maybe even to ponder if we've not regressed since then in our abilities to be crazy little anthropologists of revolt.

As in Milwaukee, what I've felt most significantly depressed by are not friends' intentions, but by the weight of the world. Even more so than the self-interested interpretations of social clamor in Madison, certainly more so than those interpretations in Cairo or Athens, to dismantle the recent intentional hype of SB590 could be an unsatisfyingly easy thing to do. Whether aimed at allied politics, activism, voluntarism, or leftism, language already exists for critique which is clean and polished in its own way, and which is so very easy to employ in shit-talking optimistic ideas/practices, especially afterwards and abstractly! In addition to being offensive, I'm sorry also for the extent to which I fall back on this critique because what I am compelled by is not shit-talking ideas or practices, but the potential of responding to the *ways* that these take hold. So again: for me, in retrospect, the already necessary and personally crushing pull of 'people' was foreshadowed in my first conversation about the bill.

It was a dark and stormy night when I came home to an odd kind of commotion. One of my housemates had news for me: he had become aware that SB590 was being pushed through the senate faster than previously expected. This was the first I'd heard of the bill, and as it struck me as surprising and as my friend seemed pretty upset, I laid on the couch to think on it awhile. There were murmurs of a meeting for those of us at home, so I tried to prepare myself, if only because I like cultivating emotional presence. It seemed to be the first time for most of us thinking about the bill, so I wasn't surprised that much of this meeting was oriented towards mundane details. It was boring—lots of questions about legislative process and whatever—and this might have been disappointing, or it might not have been particularly disappointing. The next questions were about other people already or potentially involved. At this I remember an unfamiliar urge to roll my eyes—was it really so obvious that we should talk about other people? This obviousness felt maybe even more ridiculous as I thought on who these people could be. Months later I still feel

the same: in the face of such a sinister but confusing sign which we honestly probably shouldn't have imagined or acted like we knew how to read, why should we talk first, or at all, about Dream IU?

What was foreshadowed in this conversation was how the meaning of 'doing politics' would play itself out—just like always. Although we might have talked from emotional confusion or considered nihilist despair or asked how this bill might relate to some shared conception of biopolitical management or debated the uselessness of history or made crude yet searching comparisons with political climates during instances of genocide or changed the subject entirely... to take ourselves seriously that night we thought first to other people, to potential mass and momentum, and made plans to act accordingly. And then 'resistance' manifested itself as a string of arbitrary social exigencies—from coddling Dream IU to pushing for an "occupied infopoint" over permitted tabling to needing to respond to a charge of callous radicalism in 'allowing potentially undocumented people to walk in an unpermitted march' to then having to assuage each other's worries about hierarchy—each more absurd than the last. None of which would have been so shocking or uncomfortable, were these absurd situations not already underlined with a definite seriousness...[†]

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Why did you all seem so serious? We've stated our thesis which portended its unraveling in such a way as to answer this question; basically, here we would've said that this seriousness was a

* Dream IU is a student group attempting to shore up support for the US Senate's Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act.

† If by seriousness I mean attachment to the idea that what you do produces outcomes in such a way that these will be substantially determined by your conscious desires and intentions, I wouldn't say that everyone involved exhibited such seriousness, but that a certain seriousness necessarily pervaded the whole experiment (which anyone regardless of their serious preferences might have foreseen).

response to and made further use of very weighty concepts (people and then later another, importance) which carry their own legitimacy, and then eventually tried to envision outside of this self-legitimizing circle. And now, at this most critical and tricky juncture, I don't have the heart to follow through. I think that explaining this 'why' for anyone but myself would be a monstrous thing to do, but the lack of any explanation is equally troubling. I think that this lack was a primary factor in my feeling bat crazy for at least a month—a kind of crazy I've never felt, as I really started to think that the world might as well end. Seems I'm a monster if I do and a monster if I don't. Is all that's left for me to tell another story, speak for myself?

Grasping to understand why such absurd situations seemed so serious, I can't help but remember the idea of prefiguration. Before prefiguration, though, for the sake of sensitive and angered readers, I should address this 'absurd'. I use it flippantly, to call these situations silly, but very much sincerely. I also use it lazily and so in keeping will quote wikipedia: 'the Absurd arises by the contradictory nature of the universe and the human mind existing simultaneously, and refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek meaning in life and the human inability to find any.' Clearly, what could be said and what I have been avoiding speaking to is that you took stuff seriously because you don't believe that every human desire to make meaning is impossible. Though I don't quite believe this either, I do think that certain different perspectives on the world, the individual, and effectuality don't have much to say to each other. If this is the case with yours and mine, I do apologize for involving you emotionally.

Prefiguration is the idea that we might live instances of a world we desire, but which we otherwise know doesn't exist. It has been a while since I could find any hope in such an idea, and I wouldn't suggest that anyone doing SB590 stuff hoped that the occupied infopoint, for example, could be a prefigurative instance, of com-

munism or of anything, really. What has been more alluring for me—and, I will suggest, for many friends here—is an implicit but more subtle idea, I'll call it prefigurative dynamics: that we might in the present pursue engagement with dynamics similar to the dynamics which would be at work in a desirable world. This idea is tempting in its stark emphasis on questions, which many turn to after the inevitable disillusionment of putting stake in prefiguration's dealings with facts, with bits of the good life in the present. But it is deceptively tempting in its suggestion that communism/genderless utopia's conceptualizable dynamics are more accessible to us than its material existence. Aren't these the same thing? Before getting back to the story, I'll respond with a materialist tenant: what we are able to see will never exceed *what is*.

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In the same setting, with a similar set of characters, another conversation about SB590. This one is longer and more emotionally involved than the first. The impetus is a tiny question: what should housemate1 do in regards to a request by a friend/scumbag to forward numerous articles of straight up democratic party trash over a listserve which created itself during the general assembly for the purpose of facilitating collective engagement with fighting the bill? We spend three hours answering the question, and I realize I've never talked so intently to my housemates before. Over this time, we cumulatively exhibit a range of intense emotions, and I find I can't pull myself away because it feels real and momentous. Why? I am worrisomely, lastingly confused. Do we feel so involved because we care about the listserve question? If not, what do we think is being addressed and/or being made more explicit? If so, do we care about the listserve question because we think that it entails some set of questions which are actually significant? Because they address prefigurative dynamics?

What questions are we asking ourselves? Despite my admitted confusion in the face of all the immense complexities of why? and individual whys?, after this night it at least became clear that only certain questions could be posed. The primary stated concern was, 'how are we gonna interact with others?' I was struck by the unprecedented involvement in 'intentional collective activity', especially on the part of my housemates. Our kitchen remained the scene for 'serious political discussion' and what could be talked about otherwise started to feel very bounded, and I grew increasingly despondent and ever more unpleasantly confused. I also felt I understood this excitement: when it is the potential of people which graces our otherwise barren desert of desirable action, of course I recognize the pull of pursuing social questions. But when people already means something very overdetermined, these questions will necessarily be of a particular nature.

Some of these questions, I'll admit, have been enjoyable. There were philosophical questions made overly practical: how to be both honest and communicative in poster making? How to cultivate presence at a general assembly? There were big and clearly bombastic ones, which despite their presumptions didn't feel so threatening, like how might we interact with existent and potential tendencies of revolt against biopolitical management? But most of the conversations I'm aware of revolved around a more particular set of organizational questions: questions of others, of how to be an ally or, for those a bit more sensitive, how to struggle in solidarity... questions of momentum, of how to effectively link multiple struggles, of how to spread without dilution... very personal questions, of how to engage with a wide variety of perspectives, with difference, and very structural ones, of how to avoid leftism and politics generally. And for me even more suspicious were the inordinate number of damage control questions which purported to bolster these organizational considerations; people couldn't seem to stop worrying about hierarchy. It was treated as something to be mitigated by conscious efforts, like

employing some ideas of transparency and equality of knowledge, and maintaining vigilance against vanguardism. The social object addressed by these organizational considerations is central and clearly visible but vague in its possible meaning, which is dizzying given the intensity with which it is lusted after.

Of course there were other questions less easily articulated, less audible. These existed, I'm sure, for each individual, and I definitely heard sustained murmurs around a particular desire, very quiet and cautious. Some of us wanted to ask *if* we might open ourselves up to noticing how racist fervor coalesces and is coalescing. In the same breaths we would've pondered if and how this involved observation might entail/produce/'allow for'/emotionally demand/? some particular engagement, if for no other purpose than pursuing sincere attention to that pesky me/world relationship. There are innumerable reasons why this difficult question never came to collective fruition. Regardless, the context was just not ripe for it: its social object was not visible enough. Not that the question implicates people any less, but that in its approach to the world, material meaning manifests in a 'private' existence which is not simply subjective. This meaning can not capture the attention of politics in its manic attempt to shape the public sphere; this meaning can have no truck with politics' individuals, who alone are free-floating and impotent consciousnesses and together become a most complicated power/meaning making mass.

What we are able to see will always be influenced by existent public/private, social/personal, objective/subjective symbolic structures. To put it bluntly, in so feverishly pursuing questions of social organization, we are bound to notice leftists before we notice dudes. This is not to say that we wouldn't see gender, but that because it can play no structural role, all of the ensuing gendered problems are relegated to the personal. Though it may be an interesting exercise in imagination, this is also not to say that

we should instead address ourselves primarily to the personal and private realms gender thrives in. We are not proposing one over the other, nor do we mean to implicitly rely on such binaries. Rather we want to make these dynamics more explicit, in the vain hope that we could even imagine collapsing them. We certainly are not happy heralding ‘personal’ over against ‘social’. This social, anyway, is merely a lacuna which points to the gendered specificity of political projects which would otherwise pose themselves as obviously socially important, without ever needing to address the specific ways that they implicate a specific social object. We want to say, finally and with conviction, that these questions of organization, of relating to a mass of people, are fucking boring for us. They are also terrifyingly exclusive.

Because as overdetermined as these questions already are, they are in the same measure very generative. I’ll use as a most colorful illustration the infamous and hilarious No Sweat ‘teach-in’. Whatever might be said about this debacle in isolation, its meaning exists in a context of years of conflict between Bloomington anarchists and ‘anarchist’-student-activists-turned-aspiring-politicians. This conflict has played out in specific ‘political’ situations, very much including SB590 opposition, and could be said to have finally come to a head that night, when some anarchists effectively disrupted the meeting’s immediate agenda (to sign students up to attend some union rally at the capitol building) and argued intensely with a couple old pro-union fogies. Afterwards, the rumor mill was flooded with slander about a few of these disruptors and their actions, and one of them—it ought be noted, the one most vocal that night but also generally in this years old conflict—we’ll call him Esther, responded with a mass email. This purposeful and honest restatement of his position was met with wrath from the slimy Nate, and it seemed that a most articulate break was finally at hand. Esther was glad to see existent tensions brought explicitly to the fore, to see some crystallization of otherwise elusive anti-political tendencies. While I

agreed that this is indeed what took place, I didn't feel at all affirmed that something 'real' happened. For me, this situation was a very peculiar and particular kind of real, one which ultimately left me feeling quite the opposite of affirmed.

For me, in regards to Nate, it has always been as or more real that I hate him because he is a dude, than for anything about what actually gets referred to when we say 'his politics.' I don't lament that it wasn't me who hacked him to pieces, nor do I care how this was done. As I recall how many friends went to the teach-in, fully knowing they probably wouldn't say anything, and I remember what a piece of news it became for my remaining friends, I feel there were more significant results, which carried very different kinds of meaning. It's all too hard to convey but maybe you'll remember. I'm thinking of all the other people at that meeting and the peculiar excitement of engaged argument in a public space on such 'serious' topics. I'm remembering the kind of awe once inspired in me by my experiences of particularly strongly articulated 'political' positions (which were so often measured by my desire for and perceived lack of a political position of my own), and I can't help but feel like that awe was at work for many in making this situation seem momentous. I remembered the sinking feeling of hearing an authoritative male voice while watching a room full of people listening wide-eyed. For me, what was made clear through this experience was that dude1 is a dirty leftist and friend2 will never be one. Who didn't already know this? What should any of this have meant to those of us who are already on the periphery of serious public political discussion? In this moment of 'clarity', in all of its legitimating and authorizing force, I felt affirmed only in how much the world despises me-as-woman.*

* If this seems personal, it's because it is. But don't misconstrue it as a personal attack, as if we're not all equally shaped by this world, as if responsibility has much to do with anything. The point of talking about gender-as-power or power-as-gender is to be able to talk about things personallypolitically. But no, I mean it this time, really. And I'm not talking about addressing gender privilege and working

It's not that we're missing reality, it's that we're sustaining it. I do not tell this story to condemn what happened, but to ask, what of the nature of this sustenance? What insidious worldly tendencies play into our abilities to manifest anything—or, even, exist?

CONCERNING US

So now can we begin to talk more explicitly about how we feel exiled? Or, what is up with us citing hegemonic meaning in practices which we might have just said we dislike? If we might explain this, how are we to then explain the ability to name such meaning?

One of you has wondered why we would withdraw so suddenly and completely. Sure, it would have been preferable to be able to respond in the moment, because now all we are left with are recollections and generalizations, and also for many other reasons. Yeah, we might have tried things, whether indirect and subtle or blatant and bombastic or some other combination. We had imagined interjecting the crazy at assemblies, insisting on talking in the present from emotions, and we could have certainly imagined more, but the problem was that it already felt like perpetuating the same gendered dynamics, of bringing the personal to your political. And anyway, what is really at stake for us is how the tone is already set, the fact that it is up to us to respond. Of course we don't imagine we could really create more favorable conditions. Right now, in writing this, we've accepted the necessary risk of merely articulating the opposite of an already parodied position. But still we are looking to refigure 'response' that is more immediately conducive to our own explorations.

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on someone's shit, I'm talking about how there is no safer, more pleasant personal refuge to flee to.

AN INTERLUDE FOR THE PART YOU'LL HATE THE MOST

In our desire for creation, we are compelled to maintain vigilant weariness of the self-evident because it is always against us. Not because we are even a bit less tainted or less worldly! When we talk of our desires, we have no illusion that these are not also of this world, entirely birthed from and continually conditioned by our material existence. This is *why* our desires are gendered, the predetermined essential sense of this gendering not being as significant or telling as the eventual (re)playing-out of it all; we're **not** saying that there is a simple equation, female gender causes female desires, where gender comes first. The very materially determined nature of our desires is why they have any weight at all and why we think that they constitute us, which is part of the endless (not just doubled) nature of our exile from any politics: not exiled simply 'because we are women', nor simply 'because we have other desires' but neither satisfactory to say 'because we have these desires because we are women'...

The world will always continue to determine the meaning of our miniscule attempts at refiguring meaning, including our attempts at refiguring the meaning of the world's determination of the meaning of our miniscule attempts at refiguring meaning, and on and on until it's very unsurprising why, and how, no matter how much some things change, gender always looks the same.

Please, our friends, we don't mean to ask so much of you but that in this already-lost war you not take gender's side. When we say gender, we mean only this world's gender, having no delusions about the possibility of a gender of our own. When we give messy details and make use of gendered adjectives, we do not mean to be selfish detectives seeking clues of determinism, nor do we mean to exhaust ourselves proving the existence of a binary which will

always elude us anyway. We feel the hatred of patriarchy in our bones, while we know that there is nothing for us to love.

A little example of what we often sheepishly edit out, for lack of knowing what to do with it: fewer than 1/5 of the attendees at that meeting in Milwaukee were not-men. We plus a friend from Bloomington were ¾ of these. We didn't want to be more welcomingly included, and we're not saying that they need to 'work on their shit', yet still, as we sat there bewildered and overwhelmed, we *felt* this fact. Is our feeling reductionist?

Another adjective we might not have avoided using: male. In case you were wondering, we are indeed saying that politics is always already a male politics. Is this use essentialist?

To speak to intentions, we are not writing gender for *its* sake but for our own. What is at stake is how generative gender is, its always just already there. Why should we be surprised and shocked at any manifestation of the world-generating phenomena of gender, including the futility of counting men (or not-men), including our gendered interpretations and the way anything we say will be interpreted with gender. Why should we take our exile as a cause or an effect, rather than a sign to be made use of? As we look for a way out that we know doesn't exist, we would like to at least take a first step and say that we're not gonna lend ourselves to the perpetuation of an always already meaning-laden (gendered, but this among many many other things) politics. This at least might be a real strategic move; gender will take its turn again and again.

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A final note about intentions—we're not interested in presenting a normative reading, to say that anything should have gone differently. This is our way of engaging *with* everything.

CONCERNING IMPORTANCE

Though I've been writing about importance all along (I know because I struggled throughout to avoid using this most convenient word), I'd like to make a couple explicit notes. First, though I haven't meant to suggest that I've felt wronged by the actions or intentions of friends working on SB590, the sense of urgency which trailed these actions was hateful. It was hard to differentiate at the time, but now I feel sure that while importance and flurried activity are both potentially fruitful and likely enjoyable, urgency will always be at least vaguely manipulative and rarely justifiable.

Ha! I'd like to be able to use 'justifiable' ironically, because the distance it purports to judge, between what is and what is right, is hilarious. As if the existent were just some measure away from the truth. But aren't such judgements necessary to politics? I'd like to make a little observation which, probably like everything else I've written, will only make sense if it resonates with your experience: during the events of SB590, we were always asking ourselves if or how our actions might be justified.

Another observation: during the month of February, the distance between us and the world loomed in a qualitatively different way. I wonder now at this distance. I felt strangely involved by the world, being presented day after day with important scenarios for my consideration. But of course it was us who had changed, and not the world, and I often felt like we were actively distancing ourselves from it. Sadly, now it seems too clear that this strange experience was a side effect merely of growing big-headed in a political way. Though I hadn't meant for it to happen, *importance became a function of what I thought I might affect*. Was it just me? I feel like this strange distance played itself out in how we could talk about SB590. We would ask ourselves 'what is real?' but then

already on our tongues would be a very different question—
'what is worth it?'

Surely we all have experienced in our lives particular attachments to horrifying phenomena. These experiences necessarily inform our ideas of importance. For years, a vague sense of 'what is important' lived in the back of my mind, sometimes taking form in a question which I imagined eventually pulling on myself for the sake of complicating some instance of my nihilism: 'if, by whatever hateful or meaningless process like working for a human rights NGO, I might effect just one girl's escape from undergoing FGM, wouldn't it be worth it?' Aside from the many potential flaws in this question's logic, I want to point out the confounding way that it intertwines a sense of the important with a question about effectivity. I want to vehemently deny that 'importance' should be something which 'justifies' action, this sentiment in all of its assumptions about the world, intentionality and efficacy being little better than any political brouhaha. Couldn't I abandon this question and less presumptuously involve myself, without abandoning sensitivity to the world and the conviction that shit is important?

Such questions concerning effectivity, ostensibly important in implicating 'reality', seem to always miss all of the power-laden interactions between individuals and gender, where 'success' is less easily measured. Maybe I'll be a bit cheesy and suggest that happiness and self-actualization might be genuinely (not self-ishly or privileged-ly) important, these among many other possible conceptions of importance, all of which we might continue to recall from the experience of our lives...

SCATTERED NOTES TOWARDS A POSITIVE CONSIDERATION

When I say ‘the world,’ I could be referring to nothing other than the perceived product of a lifetime of interaction between myself and material reality. This interaction is of course quite determined by material reality, but also undeniably has something to do with me.

Mediation, as some interaction between material reality and the one who experiences it, is inevitable. This much is neutral.

Everything else is powerful/meaningful. Power takes the split between reality and individual experience and imbues it with meaning. As I can see it, the crux of mediation presently is that there are two kinds of substances—subjects and objects. This is not a straightforward supposition; it can be intricately complicated, and it rests on concrete and equally powerfully meaningfully metaphysical material (ideas, bodies, gender, race...). How experience of this mediation often feels is that ‘I’ am a subject, quite distinct from the world. Although there are other subjects, it is only as this first subject that I think and act. The world maintains influence over everything else, so ‘I’ struggle against it. Of course, this ‘I’ is also a function of power.

Politics is predicated on the idea that we might affect the outcome of some struggle between the ‘I’ in its desires and the world (please remember that when we talk of desire we are not treating this as any less material than power and economics). We want to reject in particular politics’ crude treatment of mediation, where what is at stake is not how this mediation functions but the effects of its functioning. For politics’ purposes, mediation is significant only to the extent that its functioning affects the outcomes of political struggle. Present mediation slips by as being merely ‘necessary,’ unconsidered in its specificity and treated

as a burden to be shouldered: this informs the man's action plan, whereby moving forward in bits and pieces, despite a world of difficulties, is the only visible move.

What we have been wary of in the desire to spread revolt is that it seems to so often demand such necessary mediation, leaving us grasping for instances of revolt, leaving us starry-eyed about 'people' and 'effects' yet doomed to always fall short of any outcome remotely desirable. The desire seems substanceless. What do we want to see spread? Not to say that we need a program, but to ask what is actually at stake: is it really just 'more revolt'?

A nice thing about wanting to destroy gender is that this desire doesn't lend itself to such necessary mediation. For this desire, what in this world could seem worth seeking?

In a time and place where patriarchy's economic/political/social structure effectively and literally enslaves most women, a woman is systematically raped and beaten by every man she ever lives with. One day she kills a man. As she awaits her beheading, another woman comes to interview her. The interviewer is shocked by the prisoner's tranquil demeanor, and persists in hearing her life story. When the interviewer leaves the prison she finds herself in an entirely different world. Though by some accounts nothing has changed and the effects of the prisoner's action are null, the interviewer's world is turned upside down *because* she has actually understood the prisoner's insistence—that she is finally free.

In a very different time and place, where capitalism is being actively contested and there is a growing sense of social upheaval, a disparate group of women struggle for something not quite clear. Turning away from the promises of revolution, they find each other and realize that their quest is more enormous than they before might have dreamed. In a world where they are wives and mothers, where they literally can not see any instances of a

woman's autonomy, they undertake to create their own meaning. Years later, without any thought to their effect on the world, I know that there is some sense in which they succeeded.

In the present, clearly my self is my most central source of inspiration. Politics grants me no language for considering this inspiration's 'effects'.

When good little political subjects aim for effecting effects rather than affecting mediation, they prioritize their desire for some potential over their attention to the existent.

While the existent so clearly entails daily life, the 'potential' (talking now more specifically of any potential I'd find interesting) in its conceivable articulation and interpretation very rarely can. This is due in part to the fundamental unrealizability of communism. So often pro-revolutionaries—at least those who can talk of their desires at all—settle for considering the potential of widespread social disorder or revolt.

What can we think of when we say revolt? How do we experience daily life? Mediation implicates our feelings and imagination *as much as* what are more commonly treated as political effects. What is imaginable, and how, is thoroughly structured by existent concepts, most of which are gendered. The personal does not actually feel political, but personal. The world's determination has an infinite reach. There is a definite possibility that I will never be anything but exactly what the world wanted me to be.

When I say that revolt and social disorder seem to have nothing to do with gender, it is not because of essential natures that I posit to be 'true', but because of the effects and affects of power. Maybe somehow you have a significantly different affective experience of the world, but for me, try as I might, I can not conceive of revolt or disorder or any momentous rupturous social situation

except as some flurry of activity which occurs among the masses and poses itself against certain politico-economic structures. I believe that the actual taking place of such events would equally hinge on the world's existent symbolic structures, and that they would not likely destroy gender in its safe-havens of the 'personal' and 'private'. The city would burn and gender would remain.

Is this a tired critique? Of course, they all are. Maybe I'm even a step behind, and your vision of widespread social disorder actually entails gender. If so, i'd love to hear it. If not, why are we still talking about it?

But gender is not some enemy to be confronted before others. It is merely a sign of the impossibility of this world, and a reminder that I care about myself.

If there's any hope, why should it be relegated to some non-existent realm? Isn't it contained in the present?

Why shouldn't aims be immediate? Why should we ever settle? Rather than submit ourselves to some necessary mediation of ostensibly pure intentions, we would attempt a new kind of intentionality.

To cite observations of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, interesting in their content but particularly inspiring in their example: "if it is true, as has been written, that the invention of the milk pasteurization process did more for women's freedom than all the struggles of the suffragettes, then we have to take action so as to make that not true anymore. And the same thing has to be said about medicine, with its reduction of infant mortality or its invention of birth control products, or about the invention of machines that have made human labor more productive, or progress in social life that have made men no longer see women as creatures of an inferior nature. Whence this freedom, given to

me in a bottle of pasteurized milk? What roots has this flower, offered me as a sign of superior civilization? Who am I, myself, if my freedom depends on this bottle, on this flower placed in my hand? This isn't so much a question of the precariousness of gift, even if it is a circumstance whose origins should not be neglected. We have to put ourselves at the origins of our own freedom, in order to take full and sure possession of it; this doesn't mean guaranteed enjoyment, but it does mean the certainty of knowing how to reproduce that freedom even in the least favorable of conditions."

To take this description seriously is not to pretend you might turn away from the world and become all-powerful. It is, of course, difficult to imagine enacting, and its appeal is not that it outlines a game plan. Rather, it is inspiring in its example, as it evinces a sincere and active attempt to address mediation, to refigure the meaning of how they interact with the world. One implication of this short paragraph is that the way that material reality has meaning for them and the meaning of their own subjectivity are more powerful than the material effects per se. Though the suggestion by itself is weightless, it at least momentarily disrupts the normally seamless functioning of the world's binaries, which makes it kind of hard to read. In the rest of the book from which this text comes, and throughout the years of their decisively intentional collective engagement, they persistently deny the political obsession with effect and its myth of intentionality.

But I wouldn't disown materiality! Materialism has been good to me. Or maybe I've been good to it. In my obsessive attention towards my own relation to the world, I've pushed myself to try to feel how much 'I' am not a separate substance from that of 'the world'. I've helped myself believe, really believe, not just that the political is personal but that the personal is political, and this

belief propels me to see how powerful is the world's separation of these categories.

Of course, I can't stop looking for the same dynamics everywhere, and certainly this blinds me to other experiences. I'm not proposing that we could become even the tiniest bit more omniscient.

Still I'd rather be able to talk sincerely and intently about myself and my desires in their messy interplay with the world and its impossibilities, than to feel confident talking on a thousand other 'political problematics'. I do think that the former is an ability that anyone can cultivate, though I'm not interested in propounding a position that makes sense for anyone other than myself.

This is becoming nothing other than a regrettably last minute fail to finish writing. Let's talk more.

A FEW AFTERTHOUGHTS

This was not a proposal for a collective project. I wanted to articulate a position and push back against my alienation in recent events, in the hope that this might be a move towards complicating the present and opening the future: I wasn't trying to argue one position over another. Taken simply as they are presented here, both of these positions are entirely collapsable anyway. The very optimistic hope was that, out in the world, whatever tendencies these positions spoke to would mingle and eventually collapse together. I suspect that maybe they've already fallen, each in turn, of their own weight.

Were I to propose anything, I might propose that individual positions, visions, obsessions or whatever are absolutely necessary starting points towards any conceivable intentional collective trajectory. But I wouldn't want to glorify individualism nor

suggest that anything is possible—I'm literally still holding my breath.

If individualism is indeed unavoidable, when can we start talking about disparity? Not about hierarchy as something to be erased, but about life and all its messy, terrifying dynamics as things to be engaged. Can you believe that I'm not simply scrambling for more material/ideological weight or power? Do I believe this? I wanted to be decidedly intense with you. Was it appreciated? Is this even welcome?

Even if all of it reflected only a most indulgent individualism, I will defend with my teeth that this does not entail quietism or intellectualism. Fuck those poles that always leave us on the bottom. I want something better. We are better.

Lea Melandri

AUTONOMY AND THE NEED FOR LOVE

CARLA LONZI, *VAI PURE*

My reading of Carla Lonzi's writings has been purposefully partial, since I was interested in underlining the ways in which they anticipated two subsequent developments of feminism: the "practice of the subconscious" and the "thought of the difference." This is why I focused mostly on the theoretical stances of her reflections. I would like to remind readers, however, how Carla Lonzi's personal merit, to be credited as well to the Rivolta group, is that of having connected the great interpretive philosophical systems (Marxism, Hegelianism, psychoanalysis) with the practice of autocoscienza (self-consciousness), the attention to the developments of the individual life, the individual experience, filtered by collective listening. When the same provocative issues, discussed in her 1971 essays, emerge from her autobiographic (or autocoscienza (self-consciousness) centered) writings, such as *Vai pure* (Feel Free to Go), and *Taci, anzi parla. Diario di una femminista* (Shut up. Actually, Talk. Diary of a Feminist), their contradictions are easier to understand. The complexity of emotional life, its contrasting impulses, once offered through the narration of the self, often show beyond the writer's intentions.

From this point of view, the dialogue between Carla Lonzi and Pietro Consagra, in *Vai pure*, is very interesting.

The long (four-day) discussion, as the author says in the preface, touched “the irreconcilable positions of two individuals who embody two different cultures.” In the end, after tirelessly trying to produce “together,” through dialogue, “autocoscienza” (self-consciousness) and “change,” it seems that separating is the only option. Once applied to an autobiographical episode, to a relation of love, themes such as “difference,” “autonomy” and “authenticity”—which are related to gender conflict—appear more nuanced and questionable than in theoretical writings. The “need for autonomy” and the “need for love” appear closely connected, and often the latter prevails, so that women “vanish, become shadows behind men.” True love would then seem to be, first and foremost, “love for my autonomy, not love for my dependence and my service.” But it is obvious, although implicit, that women are equally tempted by the desire for dependence and devotion to the other. The possibility of balancing autonomy and affective life is a “novel” yet to be written.

The “different cultures” or “sensibilities” represented by men and women are those which have characterized their historical paths, the roles they have been allocated. The only new element is that, as soon as this comes to awareness, the man is forced to confess his “privilege,” and the woman the “quality of her feelings” once they have unfairly vanished into oblivion after spurring the other’s growth. Man’s “privilege” is having centered his own life on social productivity-artworks (in the artist’s case) but, more generally, public success—thus subordinating to this priority everything else, every relation: starting by his relation to the woman, reduced to maternal and intuitive functions, both materially as well as symbolically. From women men expect company and encouragement in their moments of loneliness and in their job. Consagra admits this: “With you, I led the most interesting

life I ever had experienced from an emotional, intellectual and complete point of view, [but] I needed someone by my side during my social life as well, in my work, in my worries. It was there that I missed you [. . .] I couldn't stand being alone while I was with a woman who didn't help me at times when I desperately needed help: company and encouragement when I felt lonely, or when I was traveling for my exhibitions, or in my studio."

Lonzi restates this: "We have lunch with the constant feeling you have to get back to your studio, you come home in the evening with the feeling you have to recharge, and in the morning off you go to the studio. [During vacations] you devote your afternoon rest to me, [before and] after that it's just work. [. . .] Our whole life is structured on work, all of it, it's not like after that we are together; we are never together for the sake of being together. The vital moment of activity and awareness, the promised land [for you] is work."

On the other hand, to the woman the priority is "the authenticity of relations, the sole end of a woman's life." The "culture of relations" is what differentiates the female sensibility, and its downside seems to be having always operated within the closed boundaries of intimacy, as a spur to man's individuality and social success, without any acknowledgment whatsoever. "Relation," to Lonzi, essentially means mutual knowledge and the fully aware transformation of the self it prompts. It is the woman who maintains this need.

"Since the woman is dialogue, paradise for her is being able to carry on such dialogue with somebody. [. . .] Women feel very strongly everything that happens to every being [. . .] while men are induced to ignore these bonds, precisely because they need to feel that they are sole protagonists. [. . .] The images men have of themselves are outside the relation, while women see themselves

within it. Hence the latter are pretty aware of their need for the other, while the former [...] only see their own growth.”

But such a precise definition of contrapositive fields is what engenders contradictions: for Lonzi, it seems, the point is merely being aware of a privilege (on men’s side) and of an unrecognized worth (on women’s side). But when her interlocutor confirms this is how he sees things, and that his life needs a woman’s encouragement and the values she embodies, she underlines yet another, different, distance. The image of the feminine as a “garden” where “peace” “love” and “happiness” blossom is “the projection of men’s needs,” and idealization of the mother-son relationship, and the temptation of reducing women to the maternal role.

“The woman—Consagra says—is the good part of humanity, the one related to love, to human relations; the artist feels it to be closer to what he wants to create with his work. [...] He feels that this garden of the life of peace and poetry, is better inhabited by the woman than by the man.”

And Carla: “Since I am a woman, and not a natural phenomenon, and since I live this from within, I can assure you that this way of seeing women is nothing but your own projection. [...] You project your need on the woman, who is herself helpless against other people’s projections and actually gratified by the best projections she can attract. [...] You give her the illusion of changing, from having no function at all, to having the highest possible function, the function society assigns to art. But from my point of view it’s just a hoax . . . This whole garden thing comes from an idealization of the mother-son relationship, which itself is an omnipresent male image, always ready to be projected on women.”

If such a comforting image is a “mirage” for the woman, her new autocoscienza (self-consciousness) leads her to be more aware of what, in herself, is in contrast with the man’s dreams. First and

foremost, behind her love and attention lies an “issue” she won’t talk about; behind the role she has been imposed lies “a different individual.” And finally there is the fatigue and the extreme alertness required to defend oneself from “[men’s] constant attempts of symbolic interpretations [of women], which nonetheless keep coming out.”

How, then, can one find a balance between the positive affirmation—as a value per se, as a sign of feminine difference, autonomy and authenticity—and qualities and competences that the dominant sex has always accorded to women only as functions of its own well-being? Couldn’t this reappropriation be nothing more than the acknowledgment of the persistence and rootedness of the “dream of complementarity”? The dialogue between “different sensibilities” is also the sign of mutual indispensability, the need to go forward together, even towards transformations that cause the confusion of violence and love to resurface. The most explicit signal of a contradiction, albeit not a fully conscious one, in Lonzi’s argument, is that once again it is the man who should “testify” and “acknowledge” this historical female quality.

“... the man has the whole world [...] where this sort of investigation [of inner life] doesn’t work, where other skills are needed, other values. Then the woman somehow expects the man to testify to this in that world, since in their one-to-one relation it is her who has revealed to him what intimacy is. This is her value, which the man privately feasts on: she imagines that he must testify to this somehow. And she feels that this could be her only way of existing in a world that functions with entirely different values. [...] If you [Pietro] aren’t my witness, then who could testify about me without having heard my words?”

It is apparent, here, that Carla Lonzi’s main effort was keeping together the need to build a less subservient feminine individuality, and the need for love. The insistence on dialogue, on “mutual

analysis,” seen as something specifically and authentically belonging to the feminine position against men’s deceptions—since they apparently produce themselves, as sole protagonists of the political scene—then appears in all of its ambiguity, as the need to build together a new awareness of themselves and the ensuing transformations. Complementarity would then lose its signs of submission and dominance, implying instead a newly found freedom and reciprocity among the sexes.

“My diary reveals what your presence has meant to me over those years, while from your book one could never understand what I meant to you, my presence is hardly there. [. . .] All this construction of the male personality as self-produced, is abstract, untrue, unreal. This self-production is false, it doesn’t exist. There is always a relation, a dialogue [. . .] as long as there is no dialogue between two consciousnesses, one of them doesn’t exist, and the other one feels like it is the absolute consciousness of the situation. [. . .] My cultural aim is [. . .] to be acknowledged as a consciousness. And, as such, as a stakeholder in our common process.”

But experience would later reveal “the impossibility” of this dream, and the fracture in the couple’s relationship once this is seen with a new awareness of the history of sexes. Only at this point other aspects of the problem appear:

- if the woman insists on asking for her existence to be acknowledged by the man, maybe it is because she can’t “fully feel it” herself;
- dialogue, seen as a constant, tiresome struggle against the male world, seems to be an involvement in “male dramas,” in “male pathos,” resulting in a “lack of self-awareness”;

– the acknowledgment of different ways of seeing and feeling the world ultimately results not in the harmonious reconciliation of the sexes, but in the temporary need for distance.

“Every time two people living together have this sort of crisis, we always feel this kind of paralysis between two thinking individuals with different times, different desires and different awareness who are both trying to propose what they have to the other party. This is when you start to feel that the bond should perhaps be loosened a bit.”

The conclusion that “there is no man for me [. . .] there is no relation with a continuity over time and a shared direction [. . .] Feel free to go,” has thus found a highly conscious definition. The common direction, if any, cannot be found through the reversal of complementarity, or through complicated equivalences, but by questioning every form of dualism, starting from sexual roles and from coercive and deforming competencies that have forced men and women to live split within themselves and to seek their integrity in a double.

Carla Lonzi’s and Rivolta Femminile’s writings have undoubtedly succeeded in breaking with many commonplace convictions, with many long-standing acquiescences to the dominance of a single sex, but they haven’t yet raised awareness of how this can be fully incorporated within sexual and affective life. What at those times wasn’t apparent (and perhaps couldn’t be) are the contradictions left unsolved by these stark positions:

– Sexuality and motherhood: if it was important to discuss the restriction of the woman within the reproductive role, the shift towards the side of sexuality ends up proposing, again, a new form of biological determinism: one replaces the uterus, the center of the biological processes, with the clitoris as “the physiological center of the female orgasm.” Having left behind the super-

position and the woman-mother confusion, the road should be open to new questions: how important is the maternal-filial relationship for adult love and sexuality? What kind of fantasy has confused sexual intercourse and birth? And, on the other hand, how many elements that have to do with sexuality enter the relationship of the mother with her son or with her daughter?

– Autonomy and the need for love. The attention to the relation with the other has been the historical and symbolic function of the woman, as the depositary of love, in charge of the growth and the preparation for the social adventure of the singularities; this causes a rupture when she attempts to redefine history and culture as they have been imposed by men, when she escapes the private sphere. But since this awareness originates from the relation of love, as a request to both modify oneself and the other, it also becomes a way to strengthen the bond and reconfirm mutual indispensability. This explains the need for the man to publicly acknowledge his debt, in terms of “self-awareness” towards the woman.

– Authenticity and deceit. To free oneself from the bridles of the “love dream,” it is wholly rejected as pertaining to the man, without recognizing the active part that the woman has played in spurring that illusion and, more importantly, without reconstructing the originating event (the birth) that preceded it. We must remember, however, that Lonzi has personally demonstrated-through her narrative of herself, through her writing of self-awareness-what she has omitted in her theorizations, probably to make them more incisive.

– The need to rescue the woman from her historical “disadvantage” leads to a quest for “equivalences” (which, as we have seen, results in idealizing and overestimating man’s position, and to subsequently build one’s own in analogy to that) and, almost

consequentially, for differences (seen as “something more” or “something different”).

What follows is an outline of some observations I published in an article on *L'erba voglio*, “Piccolo pene, ascolta” (Little penis, listen), as an answer to Rivolta's theses:

- overestimating man's privilege, granting too much importance to physiology and to the quest for equivalences, seems to confirm Freud's theses, rather than taking distance from them (specifically in terms of “penis envy”);
- the importance of psychoanalysis in this debate can hardly be ignored, especially for what concerns sexuality and the formation of individuals; this is true, more specifically, of Freud's analyses of the mother-daughter relation (see “Dora's case”), which would later inform the feminist practice;
- the necessity to recross psychoanalysis in no way implies a critical reading of it, for instance, of those aspects of both Freud's and Jung's thought which seem to consolidate sexual dualism, by appealing to biological principles—in the former case—or to bearing structures in the collective subconscious (“archetypes”)—in the latter—seen as fixed and ahistorical;
- a possible way out of the traditional biology/history, nature/culture, etc. dichotomy could be outlined by Elvio Fachinelli's proposed interpretation of Freud's discoveries. Fachinelli speaks of a sort of human nexology, defined as the investigation “of a specific field of human research [...] which is undoubtedly connected to biology and history, but which nonetheless isn't reducible to either.” Such are the “nexuses,” the “peculiar relations” through which every individual develops since after one's birth, “and through which one is formed as an individual”;

– feminism has either considered psychoanalysis a polemical challenge, or has wholly rejected it. This refers, in particular, to Shulamith Firestone, whose application of sociological schemata to psychoanalysis reveals perhaps an excess of confidence in socio-cultural factors;

– affective dependence is always construed as the key aspect in the feminine condition: dissatisfaction, insecurity, the “wish to be loved of an absolute love.” Dependence encompasses both submission and domination: it implies becoming indispensable to the other in order to prevent the possibility of losing him. The risk of being abandoned is to be avoided, so that “dependence is a matter of survival, a matter of life and death.” Affective survival is imposed at the expense of sexual satisfaction;

– the analysis of dependence always acknowledges psychoanalytical and sociological perspectives. Always central to such investigation is the role of families, in which women enter as the children-wives, mothers-and daughters of their husband. This is true both of the family of origin and of the subsequent one. The joint effects of frustration and compensation will make difficult the liberation from the imposed roles (this refers to Lietta Harrison’s *La donna sposata* (The married woman));

– a thorough focus upon these problems—dependence, survival, need for love: all related to the original relation to the mother—isn’t sought by those feminist groups who put in the center the power issues. This is particularly true of Lotta femminista, whose aim was the organization of “women’s anger,” as well as of Carla Lonzi’s “revolt”: but if one doesn’t take into account the contradictions implied by these needs, feminism risks “the assimilation of the man, the same division between private life and political engagement.” The feminist struggle against men becomes, in some cases, “paradoxically enough, the highest appraisal of virility,” “and once again focuses all the attention on male values: the

power that men have attained as something that women should take hold of”;

– the political practice of women should go through individual histories looking for signs of a common condition, and working for change within everyday life.

The article already hints at the subsequent developments of my research, both individual and collective. The sexual issue in terms of sexuality as well as of affective life (need for love, dependence, indispensability to the other)—necessarily refers to psychoanalysis, which in turn must be re-read with the awareness that history’s protagonists have been men, their laws, their perspectives on the world. Derived from this is a critique of biological (Freud) and psychic (Jung) determinism, in order to arrive at an analysis of the interconnections between nature and culture as they inextricably appear in an individual’s development (Fachinelli). But feminism, mainly concerned with collecting the “anger” of women forcibly deprived of their power, their work and their energy, or with organizing the “revolt” of those who have been forced to adapt to someone else’s pleasure ignoring their own, couldn’t face this experiential subject, rooted as it is in the body, in childhood, in psychic life, without jeopardizing its ability to draw sharp boundaries and “difference” divisions, contradictorily confusing awareness and surrender, self-sacrifice and self-exaltation, and therefore risking immobility and apoliticality.

It was clear that this issue had to be faced in the field it most evidently appears in: private life. Otherwise, the result would only have been the analogical acceptance of the male model, albeit turned to the advantage of women. Focusing on the slavery of women necessarily leads to a high appreciation of virility, whose

sole wrongdoing would then be its “imposition” as a form of domination on the other sex. Even if we “spit on man’s culture” and persist in questioning it, it is from there that we acquired our models of success, both in symbolic as well as in sexual terms.

The novelty in early feminism was to see that intimate life—personal and bodily history, etc.—bears the “signs of history.” But, when seen from the perspective of man’s millennial domination, the experience of women (even that of individuals) is reduced to an image of “marginality”: “lack,” “slavery,” “insignificance.” This doesn’t consider the fact that personal life has been able to ignore, for such a long time, the relations binding it to public life, just because the original event is framed, magnified and deformed while individuals—male or female—are still immersed in intense bodily sensations, related to the anxiety of their own smallness and defenselessness in respect to the women who have generated them and who grant them their life. A new dimensionalization, underlining the role of the original event within history, can only happen, if it does, much later. This small lag is the root of the inconsistency of subsequent behaviors, which will have to combine needs, necessities and free movement, tenderness and anger, dependence and autonomy.

Olive Oxenfree

HOW TO DANCE A RIOT

ON THE AESTHETICS OF STRUGGLE

Politics goes nowhere without movement. It is not simply an idea, decision, or choice taken at a moment but also a transfigurative process that makes and occupies space.

—Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*

A sledge hammer meets glass. Distant shouts, sirens. The air thick with tear-gas and smoke. Shards of glass sparkling on the concrete. Smoldering cars. The street strewn with objects askew. Bodies running together. Bodies forming packs that spread out into lines and condense again into tight swarms. We view here a riot scene. Riots often employ a familiar set of compositional devices: bodies circulating in atypical pathways, the spatial displacement of objects, the breaking of brittle surfaces, the burning of combustible elements. Struggles of disparate historic and geographic location have shared this sensuous moment of unrest. I speak of riots and not any other moment within a struggle as they are the privileged moment of evidence, of witnessing social antagonism, of knowing a struggle takes place. While one can certainly give an account of these moments within a struggle as

resulting from a particular calculus of social and material forces, what can one learn from an inquiry into the aesthetic and choreographic character of the riot? An examination of riots in their aesthetic dimension—their shards and ashes, their clamor and mess, their inescapable sensuality—can make evident a set of choreographic operations that mediate between a struggle and its material consequences.

This aesthetic inquiry into riots immediately appears suspect, and first, I address three critiques of the aestheticization of politics, namely the accusations of mere aestheticism, fascism, and irrelevance. In thinking through the riot as a form of struggle, I reject a distinction between political and non-political riots in favor of a political hermeneutics of struggle. I note that forms of struggle may depart or decouple from their material impetus possessing an aesthetic, symbolic, or semiotic quality that draws their performance into a play between mediation and materiality. The insufficiency of materially accounting for riots enables a turn towards its form, performance, and interpretation. In the space between a specific politics and its concrete moment of articulation, the play and movement of bodies during a riot enact a second order struggle for legitimacy. As a specific event in which to observe these dynamics, I discuss the Battle of the Camel, a street confrontation that took place in Cairo's Tahrir Square on February 2nd, 2011. If the riot enacts a struggle for de-legitimation in the immediate circumstances of an action, I address the ambiguity of what exactly causes a specific regime to fall. Through a detournement of Kant, specifically the 'free play' and 'purposiveness without purpose' that one finds within his aesthetics, I propose the riot as a form of free play during which the body becomes crucial to the elaboration of a struggle.

I. AESTHETICIZATION OF POLITICS

To raise questions concerning the aesthetics of struggle immediately appears suspect as one of three denunciations usually follows any attempt to aestheticize an event that properly belongs to politics. The first response claims that it renders a political event *merely* aesthetic, imbibed with less social force or relevance than the domain of politics. The second denounces the inquiry as fascist, citing Benjamin's claims that fascism subtracts the social content from aestheticized rituals of politics. The third critique dismisses it as a non-question, claiming politics have no aesthetic properties. I respond to each of these suggestions to momentarily keep at the bay the attacks upon asking aesthetic questions of political praxis.

In order to address the first two critiques, the suspicions of mere aestheticism and fascism, I make use of Jacques Rancière's meta-politics of aesthetics (Rancière, 2004). The aestheticization of politics occurs much before any attempt by a Nazis party to fashion a people like a work of art. The ability to partition politics from other aspects of life reflects the operation of aesthetics, which lies at the core of politics (Rancière, 2002). One cannot aestheticize political forms as they already emerge from aesthetics.

The third attack, the claim that aesthetics remains a non-question for politics bears further discussion, pervades various sectors of the left that have fallen prey to the bad faith of improvisation and direct action. Particular strains of leftist thought dismiss viewing political events in light of their sensuous or formal aspects in favor of a spontaneity and improvisation untainted by previous forms of politics. The emboldened volunteerism of insurrectionary anarchism for example often espouses the spontaneous and disavows the already formed rituals of 'doing politics.' Italian anarchist Alfredo M. Bonanno, a contemporary proponent of

insurrectionary anarchism, eschews planning, organization, and any practice that might pre-form the insurrection to come, advocating instead “independence from all parties, trades unions or patronage, as well as finding the means necessary for organizing and carrying out the struggle on the basis of spontaneous contributions alone” (Bonanno, 17). This spontaneity suggests that insurrectionary struggles have an improvisational character and an authenticity untainted by planning or pre-determined forms. Similar to the improvisational dancer who insists that her movements simply pour out of her body or the modern artist who produces innovation by performing otherness, one can note that the claims to improvised authenticity often mask their use of citation and reiteration.

One finds another form of this political improvisation in the strong determinism of world systems analysis, associated with Giovanni Arrighi and other figures. In the account of these world systems analysts, forms of struggle have a purely political character severed off from other forces and influences such as cultural or aesthetic factors. Material conditions produce forms of struggle emerging spontaneously and authentically from its protagonists. This determinist position coincides with a critique of voluntarism and a refutation of class struggle as the motive force of history, claiming that will and agency do not produce struggles that are, instead, attributable to ripe material conditions. A struggle’s protagonists do little more than let the forces of history play out, their aesthetic and choreographic choices overdetermined by the objective laws of capitalist accumulation.

As the discourse of improvised authenticity often cloaks citation, the discourse of direct action can cloak mediation. Throughout the twentieth century, groups of varying political persuasions—early proponents such as the IWW and anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre and later versions from Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi—have conceived of direct action differently and

collected disparate praxes under its banner. I address here a particular form of direct action, that which directly intervenes to shut down an operation or to mount material leverage against a capitalist or state practice. The direct action manual *Recipes for Disaster: an Anarchist Cookbook* offers one example of this conception: “Direct action can hinder corporate wrongdoing by inflicting financial losses: animal rights activists have driven several fur corporations out of business by means of vandalism, obstruction, and picketing” (CrimeThinc, 17). In distinction to legislative, lobbying, or policy-directed efforts, direct action supposedly intervenes within a political circumstance without mediation. Yet these interventions have an always already symbolic or semiotic quality as the targets operationally exceed any concrete circumstance or single site—be they fur corporations, austerity measures, or any form of capitalist exploitation. For instance, the US military apparatus spans bases and production sites around the globe such that a lock down at any particular army supply site plays a symbolic function, rather than a direct derailment of the military’s operations. The fantasy of direct action assumes that power has a lever, and if one could yank on it with enough force, one could shift the structure of social relations. Direct action as a myth of unmediated material intervention, remains in bad faith.

Rather than taking at face value either a volunteerist account that casts struggles as spontaneously erupting without form or precedent or the narrative of direct action positing struggles as purely strategic, functional intervention, one can view struggles as performative in Judith Butler’s sense of the term. Her concept of gender performativity, in which gender identification is always already citational and scripted, can translate to the citational, reiterative aspects of struggle. In disjunctive flows, tactics of struggle jump from one context to another often quoting, rehearsing, or re-staging a prior moment within a cycle of struggles. The frequent bemoaning of political nostalgia fails to take into account the performativity of struggle in Butler’s sense as reitera-

tion and repetition of pre-existing forms, perpetually mediated by previous historical and political maneuvers. One can chart, for instance, the use of occupation as a political tactic as it jumps from one context to another as different groups pick up, mimic, and appropriate the form. From the imperialist occupation of colonial land to the occupation of a workplace by labor movements to the use of the form in universities by student movements, each particular use cites a prior struggle and re-presents a practice that comes from elsewhere. The doing of politics, while making claims towards authenticity, improvisation, or spontaneity, rests upon a logic of quotation and rehearsal.

A slippage often occurs between militancy and a certain kind of collective performance in which the material drive of a struggle becomes superseded by gestures or performances of militancy. Militancy often becomes a matter of performance, a point ignored or denied by a masculinist, ejaculatory fantasy of blasting out of history. Just as the artistic genius veils his borrowings and source material, the grand politics of the unprecedented praxis, the struggle from nowhere, conceals its ritualized or performative character. This discussion points towards the possibility of an aesthetic inquiry into political struggles that is not merely aesthetic, fascist, or simply mistaken.

II. RIOTS AND THE POLITICAL

In identifying the riot as political, I have already inferred a relation between riots and politics. The riot as a social form can swing many directions. Some riots announce themselves as 'political riots,' bursting forth from a protest as the rowdy faction of a political mobilization. Other riots, such sports riots and shopping mall stampedes, often do not have any explicit leftist bent or political content that mobilizes them. Does one need to distinguish between a political riot and a non-political riot, or leftist and rightist modalities of rioting?

One can approach the question of the riot's relation to the political through a number of concepts and distinctions. If one considers Badiou's notion that politics exists to the extent that it generates a rupture with the state, one could understand the riot as a truth-procedure to the extent that it interrupts rather than serves the state. One could also view the riot as that which defies or destroys politics in its creation of a disorder that fails to remain faithful to any form of organization or regulation. In the distinction that has emerged in political philosophy between the political and politics (or *le et la politique*), the riot that contests the ontological grounds of politics would constitute a political riot while a riot as a contest between various interest groups would reflect *mere* politics. If this distinction generates a scale from the biggest *P* of political ontology to the smallest *p* of micropolitics and gossip, one can fit any particular riot into some continuum between the political and politics. The particular account of the riot's relation to politics that I rely upon draws from George Caffentzis' concept of reading struggles, or discerning a latent political content within any riot.

In exploring the presence or absence of political ambition in riots, I juxtapose two examples of rowdy behavior with ambiguous political content: unrest in contemporary Tunisian soccer arenas and the 2003 Raider Nation riots in Oakland. In a recent lecture on the Tunisian revolution, Sabra Webber noted that soccer played a crucial role in generating energy that fomented the eruption of the popular movement that ousted the regime (Webber). She noted that soccer arenas functioned as one of the only public domains in which crowds openly chanted slogans denouncing the former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In the Tunisian example, football hooliganism gave way to a popular political uprising.

One can contrast the role of sports fans in the anti-Ben Ali struggle with the Raider Nation riot of 2003 in Oakland. Following

the Raiders' loss at the Superbowl on January 26th, 2003, crowds leaving the game broke out into a riot and "set fires, smashed windows and destroyed property, including a McDonald's restaurant that was ransacked and partially burned. More than 50 blocks of International had stretches of virtually lawless zones nearly three hours after the Super Bowl" (Glen Martin *et al.*). The *San Francisco Chronicle* article on the riots describes the crowd as yelling, "Raiders Rule, Fuck the Police." Participant in the riot, Hannibal Willis, told reporters: "We lost, and that bothers a lot of the young people out here. A lot of them are real Raider friends. I ain't gonna lie—if we had won, we would have done the same thing, but milder."

The political content of the riot remains ambiguous: does Raider Nation stand in for a set of solidarities amongst working class people of color in Oakland facing issues of racism, unemployment, and mass incarceration, or does it obscure these political interests in favor of a sense of belonging and triumph easier to achieve on the football field than in class struggle? The riot's rallying chant generates an opposition between the Raiders and the police, suggesting a social critique broader than sadness and despair over the Raiders' loss. In Willis' account, the riots remain unconnected from the outcome of the game, indicating a desire to riot that exceeds reference to the football field. Unlike the Tunisian soccer crowds that morphed into a revolutionary ouster of the president, the Raider Nation riot did not extend into a mass social movement. One could interpret the riot as either a pseudo-nationalistic identification obscuring classed and racialized social relations or the coding of these tensions into the Raiders as an empty signifier. In either case, a distinction between political and non-political riots evades the ambiguity of what occurs in these examples.

A method of interpretation or reading struggles may help to address the ambiguity of riots. Political philosopher George

Caffentzis has proposed a hermeneutics of struggle involving reading events as struggle that might not announce or understand themselves as such. In proposing what he terms 'struggle literacy,' he argues that one must approach struggles in light of what they may not reveal about themselves: "Struggles cannot be taken at 'face value' for two reasons: (a) their self-definition is often (either deliberately or unconsciously) mistaken; (b) an enormous amount of struggle is not identified as struggle at all (e.g., in housework, on the streets, in schools, in factories and offices)" (Caffentzis). One must read or interpret a riot as those involved may not recognize the political content of their riot as they participate in it. For Caffentzis, class struggle pervades every facet of life: "It is the 'dark matter' of social life that accounts for the fact that not all goes well for the ruling classes even when there are neither formal strikes, nor rebellions nor revolts" (Caffentzis). If one accepts this conception of class struggle as going on continuously even when its forms appear too infinitesimal or invisible to recognize, one would dispense with any distinction between a political and a non-political riot and instead read the 'non-political' riot as keeping its politics strategically covert.

This hermeneutics of struggle becomes necessary especially when riots do not employ forms signage as explanatory devices, as proved the case in a food riot in Mogadishu, Somalia on May 5th, 2008. During the 2007-2008 world food price crisis, food riots erupted in late 2007 and continued into much of 2008 cascading through numerous countries within Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. On May 5th, a riot with tens of thousands broke out in Mogadishu, responding to a rapid hike in the price of rice and corn (Associated Press). Centered in the city's main open market, the Bakaara market, which translates as 'grain silo' or 'storage,' rioters encountered preemptively shuttered shops and restaurants that had closed to prevent looting. They set tires on fire, smashed cars and buses, and dodged the bullets of troops that opened fire on the

crowd. While aiming the attack at the city's proverbial grain silo, the riots exceeded targeting food sources and involved diffuse urban unrest, striking objects without direct connection to the soaring food prices. From the videos in international circulation on the internet, the footage from the day shows a crowd surging through the streets without any posters or signs. Visually, the riot did not announce its political content for an international audience, making evident the need for a hermeneutics to understand and interpret such a struggle as a food riot.

In reading struggles and riots in particular, one must attend to the specificity of the bodies involved and how bodies may read differently. Racial and gendered signifiers may connote either a properly political struggle or may read as ignorant, irrational, uninformed, or unsophisticated. A white spectator may view a white rioting body in a commercial center of a metropolitan city as equipped an anti-capitalist analysis while a brown body in a poorer area may register as stripped of a broader political critique. To a male witness, a riot of women's bodies may fall out of strategic political praxis and indicate female hysteria and frenzy. The designation of certain riots as political and others as non-political, mob hysteria points towards differentiation between who and what can properly occupy the space of the political. Rather than a distinction between political or non-political riots, I embrace Caffentzis' notion of struggle literacy and reading the political content into different modalities of rioting.

III. THE CORPOREALITY OF THE RIOT

As a mode of political struggle whose content one can understand and interpret through reading, riots punctuate a particular struggle or in a broader sense embody the antagonisms that pervade social relations. I turn now to the specific form of the riot and the relations it generates between bodies and spaces. As opposed to the occupation or street barricade that contest modes

of circulation and structures of permeability with the built environment, the riot travels through space in a moving assemblage of bodies and objects that interfaces with a terrain, leaving a wake of its presence upon the space itself.

The riot entails a set of corporeal maneuvers that act upon the city and also upon the body that exerts them. By physically engaging with the bodies of others and the contours of the city, the riot reciprocally pushes back and molds the body of the rioter. One does not know what it feels like to walk in the middle of the street with a large mass of people until one does it. The physicality of the riot reshapes an understanding of what is possible within social relations. The city pushes back, and praxis reverses its direction, doubling back to change those engaged in a struggle. The riot generates a mass or crowd body, enveloping or drawing individual bodies into an amoebic, collective corporeality. Bodies run, throw, condense, and swarm in a multiplicity irreducible to particular or discrete subjects. In a riot, the body converges with a habitus that discovers its logic, capabilities, and contours as it moves through space.

The collectively generated body of the riot interfaces with witnesses, spectators, and enemies. The presence of these figures raises the question of interpretation during the immediate circumstances of the riot. In an effort to avoid the anxiety of this hermeneutic question, those involved in a riot often use signage to contain and explain themselves. Without posters, banners, placards, or flyers to explain what the bodies mean, one sees groups of people, perhaps clumped together, perhaps moving in a formation. These corporeal formations do not bear any particular reference in themselves to a political aim or content. The signs must do this work, turning people walking around a building or a circle of people holding hands into a political struggle. Yet, the bodies are in no way incidental or expendable. An action with too few bodies, a situation in which the posters outnumber the

people, falls short, lacks force, and becomes an embarrassment. A struggle produces two texts simultaneously: the language provided by the signage and the movements of bodies. One does not represent the other; the bodies do not act as signs representing the political content, and the signs do not represent the aggregation of bodies. Riots often entail a double coding, literal signs and disposition of people in space as a signifying structure.

One must look beyond rallying around a textual signifier to the signification of rallying, to the meaning produced by collective bodies, by social movements as such. In interpreting the riot, one must ask the basic question of dance analysis: what are the bodies doing? Between the texts dropped on banners and the official statements made in response to a struggle by an employer, a city official, or other representative of the ruling class, a volley of corporeal gestures takes place. Police may enter the scene, moving in formation, hurling gas, firing bullets. This volley and exchange of moves becomes a struggle for the spatio-temporal position of bodies: who can circulate where and for how long?

The dance generated by this struggle for space and time within the immanent conditions of the action itself demonstrates a play of antagonisms at a step removed from the specific content of working conditions, unwaged labor, or tuition hikes, for instance. As a necessary detour away from these political ends, a contestation of legitimacy mediates between the content of a struggle and the corporeality of its articulation. In reading the bodies involved in a struggle, one can observe the action and its repression as a complex joust for legitimacy, played out on a corporeal level.

A riot operates on different registers simultaneously, the collective aggregation of bodies, a strategic material task, and an intervention into a broader scheme of mediation and power. As the form of a riot exceeds direct intervention and generates a

collective performance with an abstract or symbolic connection to its political content, its analysis must move beyond a material calculation of its success or failure. While certain struggles may emphatically profess their goals—the defensive of collective bargaining, the roll back of tuition hikes, or the self-abolition of the working class—these remain distanced from the particular site of struggle or praxis. A broad set of processes intervenes between the moment of struggle and the professed goal. One must consider the significance of a struggle in a frame wider than whether or not it achieved the professed ends: did we or did we not roll back the tuition hike? Did we or did we not abolish ourselves as workers or as women? From a broader perspective, the significance of a particular moment of action emerges from the second order struggle over legitimacy played out amongst bodies in space.

The riot presents a form of struggle that collapses the distance between the struggle over a particular content and the struggle over legitimacy. The riot generalizes struggle in whatever direction, engaging with whatever it encounters as it moves through space: not this particular window or car, but whatever window, whatever car. One must attend to the participation of the body in the choreography of the riot and the temporality of its storm and stress. Groups congregate in the wrong space, displacing objects, smashing certain things, exploding others. Police functionaries come from inside and out to grab, tug, and control the circulation of bodies. Riots in their spatial and temporal maneuvers within urban space perform the struggle for legitimacy. As power operates in the assemblages of nodes, the dance of the riot involves each body witnessing and enacting a sense of what is permissible and possible within the duration of the action. A struggle's aspirations for performativity in the Austinian sense as acting in the world rest upon the ability of body to perform and contest the regimes of legitimacy that back any particular circumstance of exploitation and domination.

IV. THE BATTLE OF THE CAMEL

In order to understand this corporeal contestation of legitimacy in relation to a specific social context, let us focus upon a moment within the recent revolutionary events in Egypt, specifically the 'Battle of the Camel' in Cairo's Tahrir Square on February 2, 2011. I piece together a description of this event from the video footage and international news sources available from my distant location in California. In writing about such a recent and unprecedented unfolding of events in North Africa and the Middle East, I am aware that a complex politics of representation surrounds any attempt to name or describe these events. I do not wish to generate a narrative that too quickly explains and contains the uncertainty of what has and will occur within the unfolding cycle of struggles.

Beginning on the 25th of January, a protest encampment against president Hosni Mubarak occupied Tahrir ('Liberation') Square, a prominent public square in downtown Cairo. One particular day during the popular uprising and occupation became known as the Battle of the Camel, taking place on Wednesday, February 2. Following a televised announcement on Tuesday evening during which Mubarak declared that he would not run for re-election in the fall to appease protesters, a pro-Mubarak rally convened Wednesday morning (Al Jazeera). Mercenaries hired by the regime, paid 50 Egyptian pounds (\$9) for the day, and plain clothes police officers held a rally in Lebanon Square in Western Cairo, during which camel riders and horse-drawn carts paraded in circles around the square. Around noon, the Mubarak supporters moved from Dokki in the west of the city to central Cairo, approaching Tahrir square. Gathering around the Egyptian Museum and pushing through the army tanks that blocked the street leading to into the square, pro-government forces mounted on camels and horses besieged the anti-Mubarak protesters. Carrying clubs, rods, sticks and staffs, they burst into

Tahrir square and provoked bloody confrontations as they rode directly into the encampment. Gun fire accompanied the arrival of the camel entourage, possibly the army firing upwards in order to disperse protesters. The anti-Mubarak demonstrators pushed back against the incursions into the square, causing the mercenaries to flee. The violence continued into the evening, as pro-Mubarak forces threw rocks and homemade bombs from the Kasr al-Nil bridge leading into the square.

In video footage of this mid-day Battle of the Camel, the mounted joust generated a complex set of movement dynamics in the square. Groups of galloping camels cut channels through the dense crowd. A constant barrage of varied sized rocks flew like fireflies or confetti in the air above the heads of those running on the ground. Huge swaths of the square began to dash as if fleeing an encroaching natural disaster, generating gaps that the pro-Mubarak contingent filled. The line between the two sides slid around the traffic circle at the center of the square, resembling opposing football teams as they negotiate the position of the line between them during each play. Both sides wore plain clothes, making the each side visually indistinguishable. In waves of acceleration and deceleration, space became overturned, claimed, and filled. In the attack of the square, the camel riders did not have a specific territorial objective beyond heading into the crowd and busting it up. The space of the square became abstracted from its specific functions and qualities during the attack and defense of positions in space.

The movement dynamics reflected a spatial joust for political legitimacy. The aggregation of bodies in a square had an abstract relation to the ouster of the president. The form of the struggle de-coupled from its supposed ends, as the encampment had no material connection to the task of removing Mubarak from office. The square became an arena to enact a power play in which the position of bodies performed the struggle for control. De-

spite the abstraction of the political legitimacy into space, bodies in the square could not escape the materiality of the violence, as they suffered injuries to head, beatings, and deaths. Amidst the waves of back-and-forth violence, the struggle for space mediated the struggle for control of the country. The uprising in Egypt succeeded in generating a mass de-legitimation of a regime that had previously organized social relations, the process of which continues to uncertainly fold.

V. PARTIES AND AFTER-PARTIES

As a form of struggle, riots often become the object of critique for their childish, petty, or superficial relation to politics. Their excessive spectacles that allegedly distract from actual political work, a position political philosopher Michael Hardt takes in an interview with Paper Tiger Television (Paper Tiger). In reading 'riot porn' or the proverbial video activist cum shot of physical confrontations with the police during a demonstration, Hardt suggests that riotous behavior eclipses mass political movements and generates a sense of false satisfaction. The riots Hardt addresses occur within large political mobilizations in which police expect and even bait protesters to predictably smash chain store windows providing a rationale for the repression of the demonstration. Certainly, these riots and the Battle of the Camel exist within different genres of rioting reflecting lesser and greater political stakes. His comments on riot porn pertain largely to the image production and forms of the riot's representation.

Hardt's analysis resonates with a line of critique that belittles the riot as a form of political production and posits a notion of more authentic political work or more proper forms of praxis. This notion of doing revolutionary politics properly usually divides into either the invention of new structures for a life to come (such as the speculation about or experimentation with anti-capitalist modes of production or reproduction) or engaging in unmedi-

ated class struggle. The distinction between these two lies in conceiving of communism as either a positive project, as a new mode or method of collective existence in the wake of value production, or as a negative project, the negation of everything existing. Ultimately, any articulation of proper political praxis must consider the embodied moment of struggle, which returns these proper forms of politics to the body and its movements. One cannot abstract struggles from the concrete moments of their elaboration, their performance in space and time.

The distinction between sober political praxis and the excesses of the riot hinges upon the multiple senses of *the party*. Inside the form of the calculating political party rests a dance party, an embodied play of social antagonisms. Following the vanguardist political party comes the after-party of disorganized struggle, or the riot. One can note the parallel between the riot and a party, in its sense as revelry and festivity. At a dance party, everyone swarms towards the center of the dance floor, wanting to be surrounded and immersed in the amoebic form of the party. Both the party and the riot bring bodies together for a concentrated collective experience, leaving it their wake messes, a disorganized array of bygone use-values.

If one can think of the riot as a dance party, one must consider the moment after the riot when everything is a mess, the city turned into a ruin of itself. Various opponents characterize these messes as trashing the city or a selfish and self-sabotaging destructiveness. In response to this discourse on destructiveness, one must remember that capital plays an overwhelmingly destructive role in social relations and urban space. Cities remain constantly in a process of making and unmaking, as buildings become torn down, burned, and rebuilt. Construction sites, block sized pits of gravel, dormant building projects, and disinvestment in huge sections of a city all reflect the constant state of undoing that characterizes urban space within capitalism. The characteriza-

tion of riots as social unrest assumes that the city was at rest in a peaceful state of wholeness prior to the interruption by the riot. Riots illuminate the contingency of use-value. The self-valorizing movements of capital supersede any commitment or interest to preserve useful spaces. Riots simply shift who makes decisions about the undoing of urban space.

The question of whether the mess created by the riot will remain the next day or workers will efface its traces, rests upon the complex dance of legitimacy. In responding to the recent events in Egypt, Slavoj Žižek described the ability of the struggle to delegitimize the Mubarak regime:

We all know the classic scene from cartoons: the cat reaches a precipice but goes on walking, ignoring the fact that there is no ground under its feet; it starts to fall only when it looks down and notices the abyss. When it loses its authority, the regime is like a cat above the precipice: in order to fall, it only has to be reminded to look down ... (Žižek)

In this analogy to the falling cat of political power, one can discern two separate moments: the drop off of the cliff representing the loss of authority and the cat's glance down representing the tumble of the regime. How can one fit the occupation of Tahrir square and the Battle of the Camel into this two step process of de-legitimation? Does the encampment represent the loss of authority or the reminder to look down? One can recall a host of other circumstances in which the police moved in to reassert spatial control and succeeded in dispersing and arresting those involved in a disruption of its authority. What about the occupation of Tahrir caused the regime's ordering forces to retreat and concede the square?

Žižek's cartoon metaphor suggests that prior to a loss of authority, the cat walked on solid ground. A more apt characterization of political power would have the cat continuously walking on an absent precipice. If it were to fall, it would land again only on another absent ground. As power has a nodal character, it is without center or head, a thicket of tentacles that do not connect back to a central body. From this vantage point, Mubarak stands in for a set of social relations and ordering mechanisms that ultimately have little to do with him. While the specificity of what made the occupation politically decisive remains unclear and ambiguous, one cannot abstract the de-legitimation of the regime from the embodied circumstances of occupation and rioting. A sense of what is possible and permissible becomes continuously enacted within a circumstance of struggle. A more hopeful reading would point to the ferocity of how Egyptians performed these struggles, their corporeal confidence and courage, that forced the cat to glance down. The decision to face death sparked by the self-immolations in Tunisia spread like a wildfire of fearlessness. A less hopeful analysis would conclude that forces of capital realized that they could control the situation more efficiently by letting the people have their square while orchestrating a military hand over. Whether this moment involves a regrouping of the existing relations or their successful interruption remains uncertain. If one reads Marx as advocating a de-legitimation of the social world, an apocalypse of existing relations, winning may prove to be the hardest and most frightening part.

VI. FREE PLAY OF THE RIOT

What would it mean to view forms of struggle in these terms, framed not by a specific political content, goal, or ends but as a second order struggle over legitimacy? One would not look for an external political goal such as the removal of Mubarak from office, but at the movement of bodies within the dynamics of an action. Rather than connecting rising food prices or the tripling

of university tuition to smashing a plane of glass, populating and holding a space, or overturning a car at random in the street, the analysis turns to these movements, the tasks performed by the body. In a detournement of Kant, specifically his concepts of 'free play' and 'purposiveness without purpose,' I propose the riot as the free play of political forces, arousing an experience of the beautiful (Kant). Certainly, Kant's notion of the beautiful shares some features with the riot but not others such as disinterestedness and the *sensus communis*. This appropriation of the beautiful stems not from fidelity but an attempt to read with Kant against Kant.

Kant's judgement of the beautiful can translate to the relation of the rioter to the urban landscape. The rioter does not interact with the newspaper box, trash can, or shop window for their functional properties nor for their pleasing qualities. She does not intend to put something in the trash can, obtain a newspaper from its box, or admire the objects displayed in the window. Rather, she interacts with the elements of the street scene with a purposiveness without purpose. She acts as though she has a purpose, taking a brick to the glass or tilting the newspaper box on its side, yet ultimately these actions serve no particular function. The riot becomes a scene of the free play of the cognitive faculties, an experience of the urban environment disinterested from its relation to either desire or goodness. The street becomes not a conduit of commerce but a play of forms.

While the connection between urban unrest and a Kantian "free play" appears out of joint as the beautiful involves a restfulness of the mind and an experience of harmony, one finds an example of this aestheticized praxis within writing of the French communist journal, *Tiqqun*. In its *Introduction to Civil War*, Thesis 10 states, "Civil war is the *free play* of forms-of-life" (*Tiqqun*, 32, my emphasis) and Thesis 30 defines communism as "the real *movement* that elaborates, everywhere and at every moment, civil

war” (Tiqqun, 63, my emphasis). This use of ‘free play’ gestures towards a reading of communism in light of Kant’s aesthetics. Tiqqun presents a runaway communism that dispenses with any need for concepts of value production or exploitation in favor of a notion of communism as a ceaseless civil war without aim or end, a war fought with purposiveness without purpose. Tiqqun finds beauty precisely in this elaboration of civil war and communism, as it states, “the only beautiful moments of the last century were disparagingly called ‘civil wars’” (Tiqqun, 191). Arising out of struggle and unrest, the riot enacts a purposive dis-ordering of the natural universe, a disorder experienced as the harmony and beauty of communism’s unfolding. Tiqqun provides one example of communism as an experience of the beautiful.

In a further connection between the riot and the beautiful, one can turn to choreographers whose compositional impulse resonates with the action of rioting. The rioter resembles a dancer performing a task-based choreography such as Anna Halprin’s *Parades and Changes* (1965), in which dancers move objects decisively around the stage and tear up rolls of butcher paper to no specific end. One could view the riot as *Parades and Changes* transposed into life without the framing or contextualization of the event as art. Halprin often explored the city as a choreographic site of play: “What we were really trying to build up to was a dance throughout the whole city” (Halprin, 11). In her work *Automobile Event* (1968), her dancers used cars parked on the street as an environment for movement, akin to the rioter’s interface with cars. While Halprin understood her work as transformational choreography without an explicit political content or ambition, she and her dancers found themselves interfacing with the police: “This became a political issue because we found ourselves getting arrested over and over again. It became a political issue regarding the right of using the street territory. When were we obstructing the peace? We were behaving in a way people were unfamiliar with and people would get irritated about it”

(11). This description could easily describe a riot as much as one of Halprin's dances.

The resonance between the rioter and the dancer raises a complex set of issues regarding cultural production, work, and revolt. If the rioter resembles a dancer, does the riot consist of a form of cultural labor? Is the dancer/rioter a cultural worker? From a particular vantage point, the riot reflects a revolt against work and a momentary refusal to heed the demands of capital. From the opposite angle, one could cast the riot as a form of unpaid creative labor that brands and advertisers will source to promote their commodities. While many examples attest to the channeling of revolutionary movements by advertisers, one commodity appears particularly relevant, a video game titled *Brink* released in North America on May 10, 2011. In the game, two factions, resistance and security, battle in a fictional insurrectionary civil war. The characters utilize *parkour*-style movement, and the billboard advertisements for the game do not fail to circle the *R* in 'Revolution.' The riot stands in an uncertain relation to the status of work. It could play an antagonistic force to capital and value production, or it could contribute to the cultural reservoirs available for appropriation.

While often privileged as a trope of insurrection, one does not know how seriously to take the riot. Either it falls short of civil war and functions within the predictable logic of the spectacle, rehashing tired, derivative moves before a tide of digital cameras. Or the riot elaborates civil war *par excellence*, running, leaping, swarming, and smashing no particular target and without any particular purpose. The riot's purposiveness without purpose could gesture to communism as an experience of the beautiful or to the maddening emptiness of capitalist circulation. In either case, an aesthetic operation occurs during the riot prior to the arrival of any activist marching bands, the street theater troupes, or art as such.

In this investigation of the aesthetics of struggle, corporeal movements mediate between a specific political content and the contestation of legitimacy within the immanent conditions of an action. This aestheticization of politics does not necessarily dilute political struggle to either fascism or mere aestheticism, but rather offers a means to evade the bad faith of direct action, spontaneity, and 'proper' political praxis. Addressing politics on the level of its aesthetic operations forges a connection between the political party and the dance party. As Marx called for the descent from the sphere of exchange to that of production, one must make the descent from the exchange of tactical gestures to their corporeal production, which is to say, to dance.

VII. EPILOGUE

In order to position the argument and my relationship to the subject matter, this essay emerges from the many years I have spent mulling over a connection between dance and political praxis. I became politicized as a teenager primarily through my exposure to street actions. My fondness for the movement dynamics they generated provoked an interest in radical politics. As a young dance student in San Francisco, I remember feeling fascination and exhilaration by seeing political mobilizations as they did many of things that I looked for in dance.

Later during my involvement with university occupations in New York City, I became much more interested in the movement dynamics generated by making barricades than in any of the specific demands on the university. The political stakes of these occupations exceeded the attempt to force change in the university. On those grounds alone, the occupations failed: the university did not meet any of the demands. However, the occupations did succeed in experimenting with what is possible within the university. The occupations used a simple device, blocking the entrances to a room, allowing various unexpected intensities

to pass. For me, the political stakes of these actions must include the phenomenological experience of sleeping on the floor of a cafeteria or having a debate at 2am about dealing with the police. The actions allowed us to experience the space of the university differently and to see what happens when we contest the university's control over that space.

I have felt anxious about my relationship to politics and worried that other radicals have a more proper concern with exploitation, poverty, or structural oppression in relation to my bourgeois aesthetic sensibilities. This essay offers an attempt to think through that anxiety and to respond, introject, and insert myself into the discourse and debates generated by my peers.

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FOUR QUESTIONS

In 2008 and 2009, Theorie Communiste wrote a series of texts regarding the gender distinction and the necessity of abolishing gender in/as the revolution, that is, communization. American feminists read these texts and two of them sent TC four questions about their arguments concerning gender and communization. TC responded with this text which elucidates parts of their arguments regarding communization that they had not yet previously dealt with and expand on their theories of gender and communization in 'new and exciting' ways.

I will answer these four questions in the same order they were asked, but sometimes the answer to the second one is required to understand the first.

1. WHY DO ALL CLASS SOCIETIES DEPEND ON THE INCREASE IN POPULATION AS PRINCIPAL PRODUCTIVE FORCE?

If all societies up to the present depend on the increase in population as principal productive force, it is precisely because they are class societies. In all societies, labor appears as the difference within productive activity between people in their individual aspect and in their social aspect; to this respect labor's social feature acquires an autonomous existence distinct from individuals and from their own activity.

This *non-coincidence* of individual and social activity *in labor* is a historical fact in all human societies up to the present. This non-coincidence doesn't need to be produced as theory (only *analyzed*)—if one wants to avoid explaining *why there is history* (which always results in a teleology). The non-coincidence means that society must represent itself to itself as something which is exterior to its own scission. The reproduction of this scission includes the constraint of surplus labor as necessary to the material existence of the class who, as non-worker, represents society. The worker, the non-worker, and surplus only exist if they exist together.

Despite the diversity of relations of production and their historical combination in the mode of production, we eliminate the specific forms and the differences between these modes of production in order to keep only what they have in common, an essential common point is the fact that “if we take any social production (...) we can always distinguish between the part of work in which the product is individually consumed by the producers and their families and another part—abstraction which is made from the portion entering productive consumption—which is always of surplus labor, therefore the product serves to satisfy the general needs of society. No matter what the distribution of the surplus product, and whatever person who acts as the representative of these social needs (underlined by me).” (Capital). Capital did not invent surplus labor. Whenever a faction of society has a monopoly of the means of production, the worker, free or not, as “an objective individual” in the case where belonging to a community is the preliminary condition to their activity as a worker or a “contingent individual” is forced to work beyond the amount of labor needed to reproduce themselves, thereby producing a surplus destined to subsistence for the owners of the

* The distinction between “contingent individual” and “objective individual” is reviewed by Marx in *Formes antérieures à la production capitaliste*. This text is often published with *Grundrisse*.

means of production. The distinction between necessary labor and surplus labor can even be extended to “classless” societies, which are in fact only societies where classes exist in an element other than the economy.

There cannot be surplus labor without a level of labor productivity that allows the extension of labor time beyond that which is necessary for the producer to obtain their own subsistence, a level of labor productivity that can increase surplus labor *without* population growth. But this productivity is in no way the *cause* of surplus value and exploitation. Surplus labor implies, in one form or another, a relationship of exploitation, because it implies a social differentiation between individual and social. Therefore in every mode of production, the increase in population as productive force, as well as the productivity of labor, *drive the contradictions which are rooted in the reproduction of the conditions of this exploitation*. Surplus labor determines population growth as principal productive force, and so it is a principle productive force in all class societies. This necessity drives the contradictions specific to each mode of production which requires it.

Surplus labor and exploitation are given simultaneously, and “This never happens without help from the force that subjects one to another (laborer and non-laborer, even if it’s the community that appears to be this way)” (*ibid*, t.2, p.185). If a part of the society can carry out this takeover by force of another part of society, it is because in no social form up until now have social activity and individual activity coincided. Whatever the forms may be of society, of community, of social activity, they have always taken an independent and autonomous form in relation to the individuals of which they are the community. These forms can be blood relation, common ancestry, the totem, religion of the ancestors, the “forces of nature”... There are no obligations or duties without those who are compelled abide by them. This indepen-

dent social form can even be an assemblage of all the members of the community, which is never merely the sum of its parts.

And everywhere this community appears as men vis-à-vis women.

Already, in the Paleolithic societies, the death rituals revealed marked social hierarchies. On the basis of these hierarchies, during the Neolithic period, the first theocratic states are formed (around the Sumerian temples), formalizing and deepening the relations of force [coup de force] already present in all the previous social forms. During the Copper Age, the inequalities become rigid and turn hereditary, at the moment when exchange becomes organized over vast spaces and when metallurgy, the wheel, the wagon and the tank, the domestication of the horse, modify qualitatively the productive force of work. To speak clearly: “primitive communism” is a huge joke and the questions posed in terms of origin are always suspect.

Essentially, a given mode of production consists in the reproduction of the coercion which concentrates the appropriation of surplus labor, or, in other words, in the assemblage of social conditions that determine and reproduce a specific mode of exploitation. In the capitalist epoch, the form of the appropriation of surplus labor is directly economic; at other periods the relations of blood, religion, or the direct sexual division of the community have functioned as relations of production. A mode of production is understood by reconstructing the conditions and the effects of this complex articulation (in which the economic is not always given clearly and plainly, though one is tempted to see it this way when one transposes the capitalist conditions on the previous modes of production) and not by piling superstructures upon infrastructures.

This division of society between workers and non-workers is immediately doubled in another division internal to the first, but escaping its terms: *the gendered division of society*.

The first condition of this surplus labor is “population control,” the *control of the principal productive force* (which is the increase of the population), and thus the *control of those who are the producers*. The autonomization of the social character of activity is in itself the existence of a constraint on surplus labor, and is constructed as a social distinction of anatomical characteristics. From biological reproduction, and from the specific place of women in this reproduction, the result of a *social process* is presupposed *as given*. The point of departure (and having a point of departure is one of the necessary flaws of theoretical production) is what makes this place specific as social construction and differentiation : the modes of production up to today. The increase of the population as principal productive force is no more a natural relation than any other relation of production

Indeed, up until capital, including where it becomes contradictory, the principal source of surplus labor is the work of increasing the population. The necessary appropriation of surplus labor, a pure social phenomenon (surplus labor is not tied to the supposed overcapacity of labor) creates gender and the social pertinence of the gender distinction in a sexual and *naturalized* way. The possession of a uterus does not signify “baby maker”; to move from one to the other one requires an entire social apparatus of appropriation and a scenario of “making babies”, the apparatus through which women exist. The possession of a uterus is an anatomical *feature*, and not immediately a *distinction*, but “baby maker” is a social distinction which makes the anatomical *feature* a *natural distinction*. Within the nature of this social construction, of this system of constraint, that which is socially

* The apparatus of violence includes rape, but also love, *care*, softness, concern for others, being a body.

constructed—women—are always sent back to biology. Without putting this into operation, to have a uterus is an anatomical feature and not a distinction: the uterus does not make the woman any more than the melanin makes the slave. Just as for capital to appear as a thing is a manifestation of self, belonging to its being, it would not be a relation without appearing as a thing ; just as value of labor power would not be what it is without appearing as the price of labor ; just as the production of the social category of woman would not be what it is without being naturalized and the relation between men and women would not be a social relation without appearing as natural.

Whether one is in the Amazon, in the Islands of Trobriand (Malinowski), in Athens or New York, there is autonomization as a form of the community or class, there is surplus labor and therefore labor, and thus there is the population as principal productive force. And by the same token, there is a gender division, the creation of women' by the social actuation and the appropriation of the biological reproductive capacity and there is appropriation of the biological reproductive capacity of women. Each time, a whole structure of social violence defines them, and they are coerced and conscripted (this can be the prohibition of the usage of certain hunting weapons, private and domestic labor, or part-time work).

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE INCREASE IN POPULATION TO BE THE MAIN PRODUCTIVE FORCE?

As soon one has said "productive forces," one has indicated the possibility of counting and listing: population, machines, science, etc. But then, one runs up against the heterogeneity of the elements that are to be added together in our list. One must also add the modalities of the application of science, the technical capacities of a populace (a historic phenomenon), an organiza-

* God created Brigitte Bardot, not woman.

tion of work, a social organization of production (the factory) and then—why not!—The intervention of the state, the power of credit. Counting and addition cannot make concepts match up with categories. If, on the other hand, the productive forces “develop”, then they can be measured. The measure is the productivity of work. *The productive forces* are grasped only in a synthesis which is not the result of an addition and is not resolved through a census. This synthesis is the *productive force of labor*.

“Indirectly, however, the development of the productivity of labor contributes to the increase of the value of the existing capital by increasing the mass and variety of use-values in which the same exchange-value is represented and which form the material substance, *i.e.*, the material elements of capital, the material objects making up the constant capital directly, and the variable capital at least indirectly. More products which may be converted into capital, whatever their exchange-value, are created with the same capital and the same labor. These products may serve to absorb additional labor, hence also additional surplus-labor, and therefore create additional capital. The amount of labor which a capital can command does not depend on its value, but on the mass of raw and auxiliary materials, machinery and elements of fixed capital and necessities of life, all of which it comprises, whatever their value may be. As the mass of the labor employed, and thus of surplus-labor increases, there is also a growth in the value of the reproduced capital and in the surplus-value newly added to it.” (Capital Vol III, New World edition, p 248)

Defined synthetically as the *productive force of labor* we understand that the productive forces “develop”, and we understand *how*. Capitalism has not “liberated the development of the forces of production”, it has imposed upon the productive forces a type of development determined by its own rhythm and pace, includ-

ing with regard to the population. For capital, the increase in the productive force of labor is not universally applied:

« Pour le capital, cette productivité est augmentée non quand on peut réaliser une économie sur le travail vivant en général, mais seulement quand on peut réaliser sur la fraction payée du travail vivant une économie plus importante qu'il n'est ajouté de travail passé... (...) Du reste, c'est seulement dans le mode de production capitaliste que doit s'accroître absolument le nombre de salariés, en dépit de leur diminution relative. Pour lui, des forces de travail sont en excédent dès lors qu'il n'est plus indispensable de les faire travailler de douze à quinze heures par jour. Un développement des forces productives qui réduirait le nombre absolu des ouvriers, c'est-à-dire permettrait en fait à la nation tout entière de mener à bien en un laps de temps moindre sa production totale, amènerait une révolution, parce qu'il mettrait la majorité de la population hors du circuit. Ici encore apparaît la limite spécifique de la production capitaliste... (...) La limite de cette production c'est le temps excédentaire des ouvriers. L'excédent de temps absolu dont bénéficie la société ne l'intéresse nullement. Pour elle, le développement de la force productive n'est important que dans la mesure où il augmente le temps de surtravail de la classe ouvrière et non pas où il diminue le temps de travail nécessaire à la production matérielle en général ; ainsi il se meut dans des contradictions. » (Marx, *Le Capital*, Ed. Soc., t.6, pp.274-275-276).

The law of population in the capitalist mode of production is governed by the relation between necessary labor and the capacity of capital to transform superfluous time into surplus labor.

The theoretical synthesis of the productive forces is worked out in the productive force of labor and its development in the law of population. The productive forces are a relationship of appro-

priation (and not of property) between the means of production, the objects of labor and the producers (including here the non-workers as organizers of production). We say a relationship of appropriation and not a relation of production (the factory, for example, is the specific product of capitalism and its relations of production—*cf.* real subsumption as specifically capitalist mode of production—but the factory is not itself the relations of production which constitute capitalism) because if this relation takes place inside the mode of production, and if its form and rate of development are determined by the mode of production, it is not a *relation* that remains and persists in the relationship of appropriation, but the restoration [rétablissement] of a *unity* such as the relations of production determine it (the worker is reunited with the object and the means of labor when it ceases to be owned). And we return from there to work and to the population.

Population can be called the principal productive force only insofar as it becomes the *productive force of labor* (rather than science or the means of production, etc.). It becomes this not as a simple collection of individuals, but insofar as a specific social arrangement has population as its *object*, and makes population into the productive force of labor, which is the true concept of productive forces.

In the capitalist mode of production, the principal “productive force” is the working class itself. No matter the transformations of the production process which are induced by the passage to real subsumption, it is always living labor which brings the dead labor back to life. It is always the productive force of labor which is the synthesis of all that we enumerate as productive forces. It’s not only a matter of a principal productive force amongst many others, but of their synthesis and of their very existence.

Labor is not a productive force as long as it resides in the subjectivity of the laborer. The working class is this “principal productive force” only insofar as its activity is consistently necessary and always in excess, insofar as its activity is in itself “the contradiction of labor time”. The content of the famous contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production is distilled in the contradiction between the capacity for labor to valorize capital, and the fact that this capacity to valorize is called into question *by* the ongoing process of valorization. Therefore when Marx qualifies the working class as principal productive force, he qualifies it as a *revolutionary class*. The “principal productive force” “breaks apart” the very narrow relations of production only by abolishing itself, and along with it all the relations of production in which it exists and is reproduced as principal productive force (the abolition of the relation is the abolition of its terms). That is related to the following question.

3. TC OFTEN WRITE THAT “LABOR IS A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL”. DOES THIS MEAN THE FALLING RATE OF PROFIT? OR DOES IT MEAN THE INCREASING SURPLUS POPULATIONS POSE A PROBLEM OF REVOLT? OR BOTH?

The capitalist mode of production is the first mode of production which has a problem with labor and the increase in the population as “principal productive force”. Even in real subsumption of labor under capital, the extraction of surplus value, in its relative form which reduces necessary labor time, must be combined with the increase in simultaneous working days. An increase in

* The increase in population as principal productive force drives the contradictions in all modes of production, but the capitalist mode of production is the first whose problem with population and labor is intrinsic to its dynamic and not a rupture in its regeneration : The alternation of the full world and the empty world of the feudal system ; antique colonial expansion ; the different solutions to the pressure on the milieus of the “primitive communities” ; the frontlines pioneered by the asiatic mode of production.

the rate of exploitation which is not accompanied with a multiplication of working days will cause an immediate and radical decline in the rate of profit.

It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting *necessary labour* in motion—i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population—population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. (Hence the correctness of the theory of surplus population and surplus capital.) It is equally a tendency of capital to make human labour (relatively) superfluous, so as to drive it, as human labour, towards infinity. Value is nothing but objectified labour, and surplus value (realization of capital) is only the excess above that part of objectified labour which is necessary for the reproduction of labouring capacity. But labour as such is and remains the presupposition, and surplus labour exists only in relation with the necessary, hence only in so far as the latter exists. Capital must therefore constantly posit necessary labour in order to posit surplus labour; it has to multiply it (namely the *simultaneous* working days) in order to multiply the surplus; but at the same time it must suspend them as necessary, in order to posit them as surplus labour. As regards the single working day, the process is of course simple: (1) to lengthen it up to the limits of natural possibility; (2) to shorten the necessary part of it more and more (i.e. to increase the productive forces without limit). But the working day, regarded spatially—time itself regarded as space—is *many working days alongside one another*. The more working days capital can enter into exchange with *at once*, during which it exchanges *objectified for living labour*, the greater its realization at once. It can leap over the *natural*

limit formed by one individual's living, working day, *at a given stage in the development of the forces of production* (and it does not in itself change anything that this stage is changing) only by positing *another* working day alongside the *first* at the same time—by the spatial addition of *more simultaneous working days*. E.g. I can drive the surplus labour of A no higher than 3 hours; but if I add the days of B, C, D etc., then it becomes 12 hours. In place of a surplus time of 3, I have created one of 12. This is why capital solicits the increase of population; and the very process by means of which necessary labour is reduced makes it possible to put new necessary labour (and hence surplus labour) to work. (I.e. the *production of workers* becomes cheaper, more workers can be produced in the same time, in proportion as *necessary labour time* becomes smaller or the time required for the *production of living labour capacity* becomes relatively smaller. These are identical statements.) (This still without regard to the fact that the increase in population increases the productive force of labour, since it makes possible a greater division and combination of labour etc. The increase of population is a *natural force* of labour, for which nothing is paid. From this standpoint, we use the term *natural force* to refer to the *social force*. All *natural forces of social labour* are themselves historical products.) It is, on the other side, a tendency of capital—just as in the case of the single working day—to reduce the many simultaneous necessary working days (which, as regards their value, can be taken as *one* working day) to the minimum, i.e. to posit as many as possible of them as *not necessary*. Just as in the previous case of the single working day it was a tendency of capital to reduce the necessary working hours, so now the necessary working days are reduced in relation to the total amount of objectified labour time. (If 6 are necessary to produce 12 superfluous working hours, then capital works towards the reduction of these 6 to 4. Or 6 working days can be regarded as one working day of 72 hours; if necessary labour time is reduced by 24 hours, then

two days of necessary labour fall away—i.e. 2 workers.) At the same time, the newly created surplus capital can be realized as such only by being again exchanged for living labour. Hence the tendency of capital simultaneously to increase the *labouring population* as well as to reduce constantly its *necessary* part (constantly to posit a part of it as reserve). And the increase of population itself the chief means for reducing the necessary part. *At bottom this is only an application of the relation of the single working day.* Here already lie, then, all the contradictions which modern population theory expresses as such, but does not grasp. Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and the not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist. (Marx, *Grundrisse*, from marxists.org, p. 400)*

* * *

Within an analytical framework in which the gender division is understood as *contradiction*, if we understand that *labor is a problem for capital*, it is not merely a way of understanding the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. To say “labor is a problem for capital” also allows us to understand that the working class as the primary productive force simultaneously reproduces the categories of men and women. The categories of men and women are

* From this point of view, we cannot agree with certain aspects of the approach of the text “Misery and Debt”. The process of the “temporal contradiction” outlined there is not founded on the development of value. Without taking into consideration the conditions of the absolute increase of the mass of profit, this text treats the “general law of accumulation” through rising organic composition as a physico-technical law. When all is said and done, we do not know what blocks expanded reproduction to the point of not being able to absorb capital and liberated labor. The technical-physical lines of emerging/declining industrial sectors cannot all be understood homogeneously through a unified evolution of organic composition, mass, and rate of profit. The law of population of the capitalist mode of production is governed by the relation between necessary labor and the capacity of capital to transform superfluous time into surplus labor. The text is written as if these discrete processes did not unfold in an economy where they are internally defined by the relations of value and profit.

thus *absolutely not contingent*. However, with the capitalist mode of production, these categories can no longer be taken for granted [ne vont plus de soi], because it is the population as primary productive force which, with capital, can no longer be taken for granted [ne va plus de soi].

« Tant que la contradiction n'est pas apparue, les conditions, dans lesquelles les individus entrent en relation entre eux sont des conditions inhérentes à leur individualité, elles ne sont nullement extérieures et seules, elles permettent à ces individus déterminés et existant dans des conditions déterminées de produire leur vie matérielle et tout ce qui en découle *ce sont donc des conditions de leur manifestation actives de soi et elles sont produites par cette manifestation de soi*. En conséquence, tant que la contradiction n'est pas encore intervenue, les conditions déterminées, dans lesquelles les individus produisent *correspondent donc à leur limitation effective, à leur existence bornée*, dont le caractère limité ne se révèle qu'avec l'apparition de la contradiction et existe de ce fait pour la génération postérieure. Alors cette condition apparaît comme une entrave accidentelle, alors on attribue à l'époque antérieure la conscience qu'elle était une entrave. » (Marx, *l'Idéologie allemande*, Ed. Sociales, p. 98).

With the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction “appeared”: that of the population as principal productive force. It is impossible to escape from it without the abolition of this mode of production. This mode of production hatches in its chest a class struggle which, in abolishing capital, will not permit any person to escape the question of the “inherent conditions of their individuality.” This is a question determined according to this “apparent contradiction” between being a “man” or a “woman”—that needs to be overcome. In its own terms and its own dynamic, the emergence as contradiction of gendered reproduction of humanity existed as a particular moment of the contradictory relation

of capital and labor at the interior of the capitalist mode of production, that is the moment of capital as moving contradiction:

«Le surtravail des grandes masses a cessé d'être la condition du développement de la richesse générale. (...) Le capital est une contradiction en procès : d'une part, il pousse à la réduction du temps de travail à un minimum, et d'autre part il pose le temps de travail comme la seule source et la seule mesure de la richesse » (Marx, *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique*, Ed. Anthropos, p.222).

Even in this, it is the *gender division which, in the capitalist mode of production, is a moving contradiction* : on the one hand it pushes the indistinct and abstract universality of individuals face to face with the power of society which it represents as autonomous value; and on the other hand, it poses labor and the growth of the population as the sole source of that valorization. It wants women and it doesn't want them. It wants the gender distinction and it wants the universality of the simple individual, abstract and free. It wants the "free woman", but always woman is her ideal, and the contradiction in which the gender distinction is locked must appear at one and the same time objectively necessary and individually contingent. Also, it wants the family as private space of reproduction of labor power—and at the same time, to destroy the family.

* * *

As for the "problem of revolt" that is posed by overpopulation, it is important to consider that the question raised by overpopulation does not have its own dynamic, is not a question which can define itself. The question of surplus population is always modeled according to the categories and the determinations of each cycle of struggles. It is thus that the "problem of revolt" is inscribed in labor as a "problem for capital".

During the crisis of the 1930's, the unemployed became objects of organization and they functioned as a particular social force. The fight against unemployment moves forward by reinforcing the bonds between the unemployed and the employed. It's not a matter of *posing unemployment as the social manifestation of the contradiction of waged labor, and posing the struggle of the unemployed as the obsolescence of the activities of the struggle of the waged workers* [*poser le chômage comme la manifestation sociale des contradictions du travail salarié et la lutte des chômeurs comme caducité en actes, dans la lutte de classe, du travail salarié*]. It is nothing but the sign of capitalist anarchy in the market. In France, for example, it enhances the struggle against unemployment through guaranteed unemployment insurance [l'assurance obligatoire] and by the establishment of the 40 hour work week.

During the same period, the struggle of the unemployed in Amsterdam revealed the impossibility of the inverse, that is, organizing the class against capital around unemployment *as the obsolescence* of the wage relation (this kind of struggle is now possible, because since then the clear separation between work and unemployment has been made more clear, which had only begun to be formalized during the dissolution of the crisis of the 1970s and the restructuring which followed this separation).

"The unemployed of Amsterdam were without a doubt the most radical sector of the proletariat in the Netherlands. Obligated to their daily migration to the unemployment office, the private workers politicized themselves very quickly; the long lines every day were conducive to political discussion and the dissemination of revolutionary press, in particular those of the council communists, whose propaganda resonated. After 1932, "struggle committees" of unemployed were formed in Amsterdam ; Very combative, they fell to the blow of the CPN (the communist party of the Netherlands) in spite of the propaganda of the GIC (Inter-

national Communist Group) to “carry out the struggle without any union or political party.”

« Le mouvement des chômeurs déboucha en juillet 1934 sur une véritable insurrection, lorsque le gouvernement conservateur de Colijl décida de réduire les allocations de chômage. Le 4 juillet, les ouvriers du quartier du Jordaan d'Amsterdam manifestèrent spontanément, sans consignes de partis ou de syndicats, contre les mesures gouvernementales. Ils offrirent dans ce quartier, comme dans le “quartier indonésien” une vive résistance aux attaques de la police motorisée ou à cheval. Les rues du quartier du Jordaan furent bientôt couvertes de barricades et aux mains des ouvriers et des chômeurs, qui une fois “victorieux” rentrèrent chez eux. Mais le lendemain l'armée occupait le quartier avec des chars et des mitrailleuses. La répression contre les ouvriers se solda par 7 morts et 200 blessés. Fort de sa “victoire”, le gouvernement néerlandais interdit toute manifestation et tout meeting. Bien qu'ayant pris ses distances avec la lutte des ouvriers du Jordaan—en n'y voyant que pillages et provocations- *De Tribune*, l'organe du CPN fut interdit. (...) La défaite des chômeurs d'Amsterdam était sévère, car elle signifiait une défaite grave du prolétariat des Pays-Bas, qui était resté passif. En effet, la lutte des chômeurs fut considérée comme une lutte à part, d'une catégorie particulière des ouvriers. Les chômeurs eux-mêmes ne tentèrent pas de généraliser leur mouvement. Le corporatisme et le manque de solidarité entre catégories d'ouvriers, autant de faiblesses : “...Les forces de classe étaient encore si faibles que les ouvriers en lutte ne prêtèrent pas encore pleinement attention à l'extension du mouvement comme leur tâche propre. On était d'avis qu'il s'agissait seulement d'une lutte des chômeurs devant être menée par eux seuls. Dans le Jordaan et dans ses environs, il y avait différentes usines ; pourtant il n'y eut aucune tentative de la part des chômeurs en lutte de les entraîner dans la lutte.” (Räte-Korrespondenz—organe du

GIC—n°8-9, 1935). » (Courant Communiste International, “La gauche Hollandaise”, p 219-220, Ed du CCI).

When one considers the march of the unemployed of the CGTU (communist) in France, the revolt of Jordan, or the same violent movements in the US, one observes the parallel consolidation of the position of the unemployed and of the waged worker; they are not *two separate worlds*, rather, there is a *separation* and a *reciprocity*. The crux lies within the fact that for the reciprocal definition of unemployed and waged worker, the point of departure, during this period, is the definition of waged work. It is waged work which defines the unemployed. The solution to unemployment is posed in the wage system, in its new modalities put in place by the crisis and social struggles. It is this redefinition of the waged worker in real subsumption which, consequently, defines the unemployed. The unemployed, whose struggles are either direct determinations of this redefinition (action of the CGTU), or they become tragically isolated (Amsterdam and the US). They cannot be the basis of a recomposition of the class which would address the totality of the wage labor relation of capital.

It is not unemployment in itself which determines our understanding of the revolt of the “supernumerary” (there were periods, in the already too-long history of this mode of production, where unemployment was much higher than it is today), but rather, the relation to the aggregate of waged work. In the present cycle of struggles lies the possibility for the class struggle to turn *capital*, insofar as it is an ongoing contradiction expressed as “tendential fall in the rate of profit” into *immediate activities*. The mass of unemployed themselves tells us only that crisis exists—they say nothing about the particularity of an epoch of the class struggle.

By means of precarity, flexibility, part time work, and all the imaginable forms of unstable employment, capital, having re-

duced the amount of labor which it required for its reproduction, manages to maintain, as much as possible in the current growth model, an equilibrium between the reduction of necessary labor which increases surplus labor, and the multiplication of simultaneous days, which is to say, the increase of the same necessary labor to increase its surplus. The transformation of the global relation between working class and capital persists through a clear separation between “reserve army” and “active army.” The radical novelty in the struggle of the “supernumerary” is the capacity of the proletariat to deal with their situation, to lay claim to their situation, in the relation of exploitation which establishes capital as ongoing contradiction. *This is their capacity to take the offensive against the inessentialization of labor—the reduction of the amount of labor that capital requires for its reproduction.*

“We demand nothing”, one could say.

4. TC SAY THAT WOMEN/THE FAMILY ARE A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL. IS THIS MERELY BECAUSE LABOR IS A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL, AND WOMEN/THE FAMILY REPRODUCES LABOR?

Yes, but once this is said, one has articulated an abstract universal.

In the text *Gender Distinction, programmatism and communisation* published in TC 23, we wrote [and have repeated above] (TC 23, p. 111):

“With the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction “appeared”: that of the population as principal productive force. It is impossible to escape from it without the abolition of this mode of production. This mode of production hatches in its chest a class struggle which, in abolishing capital, will not permit any person to escape the question of the “inherent conditions of their individuality.” This is a question de-

terminated according to this “apparent contradiction” between being a “man” or a “woman”—that needs to be overcome. “

In the course of the discussions which accompanied the drafting and publication of this text, one among us made the following critique:

“The end of this chapter says that the only dynamic is class struggle and class abolition. An attack on the men/women relation is necessary to the abolition of capital, but it is not included with the relation itself. Therefore, this is a little overture, on principle, to say that it is necessary to attack the gender relation specifically, and that will be a struggle within the struggle, because the entire proof relies on a dynamic (the one of the class struggle) that is like an external thing which is included, reintroduced from the outside as the dynamic of the man/woman relation. In this respect, the text takes the relation between men and women as an object and the only content that the text gives to this relation is the wage relation, and so one cannot see why the specific struggle around the gender division is necessary, except because we have the (correct) intuition that this specific attack is necessary. Thus it is necessary for us to say something about the dynamic, or at least say that we lack the dynamic.”

This critique was included in the text *Comrades, but women*, published at the end of the *Gender distinction*...as an element of discussion and critique :

“And yet, if we say that the abolition of gender will be a revolution in the revolution, this assumes a proper dynamic which is something other than the class struggle, which can’t be reduced to the class struggle—or even to the class struggle in its turning against itself. Moreover, if one speaks of the proper dynamic in the course of the revolution, already there is today

a proper dynamic of the gender relation which is not reduced to the class relation. To say proper dynamic is to say specific contradiction, for a simple relation of antagonism doesn't contain any dynamic. Thus it is about the possibility of thinking a revolution in the revolution, a contradiction in the contradiction. But it is problematic to include one element only *within* another element. The traps and the difficulties are legion..." (TC 23, p. 126).

The gender division and the relation between men and women was articulated as having the exact same content as the class struggle. The specificity of this relation could only be one accident of the class struggle coming in to "supplement" the class struggle. The fundamental proposition of the text in TC 23 was:

"The appearance as contradiction of the gendered reproduction of humanity *is identical to the contradictory relation of capital and labor at the interior of the capitalist mode of production, which is to say, identical to capital as moving contradiction*" (we have added an emphasis this time).

* * *

The problem with the assertion of such an identity is that the relation between men and women, the division and the contradiction between the genders, is always regarded as a differentiation of an original sameness. In our text, the distinction between the class struggle and man/woman relations was hidden away in capital as a moving contradiction, which was at once the departure point and the arrival point. This conception merely offers a choice between the "return to self", self-determination of all as a unity (the dialectic of the *preservation of the same* within the different), and the "bad infinity", which is the reflexivity of an infinite reciprocal action, the mere addition of simultaneous contradictions. This totality (capital as ongoing contradiction)

merely announces itself in the diversity of its determinations. We could not consider, without sinking into teleology and universal abstraction, each determination as differentiation of a totality which is always and everywhere self-identical, as particularization of the universal, as its *self-determination*. The universal is not immanent to the particular (this would only bring us back to the problematic of the monad), but there is a necessary relation amongst particularities. The immanence of the universal to its parts is not what relates the determinations to each other. The capitalist mode of production as ongoing contradiction is not the universal as immanent to its particular moments (waged labor, capital, ground rent, exploitation, gender distinction).

Nor can one merely reverse the order of existence, from the pre-existence of the totality/identity, to the pre-existence of the determinations/particularities. The particularities do not precede their identity—if we said so, we would be left only with the ideology of the chance encounter to explain the connection between the class relation and the gender relation.

The unity embodies the necessary co-presence of the two terms (class and gender : exploitation and male dominance) which can only exist *together*. The totality is the internal requirement each has for the other—and thus, the totality is also what *differentiates* each one. Indeed, behind the simple concept of co-presence or involvement/implication [implication], many meanings are possible, including reductive models where the highest achievement is the interaction where x acts upon y which reacts upon x , *ad libitum*. This system can contain in itself the principle of its overcoming *only if* one defines the totality as distinct from its particularities, as carrying *the relation between its terms (class and gender) to a contradiction for themselves*. Totality, capital as ongoing contradiction, is active, it is not the simple co-presence or implication of its terms (class and gender).

A relation of the Whole to its parts, the Whole produced out of the category of “self-determination”, we give a Whole which can be recognized not as immanent to its parts, but as the *necessary connection between them*. The connection between its parts is what makes them belong to the totality.

In connection to the gender distinction we can then formulate the following methodological approach: *it is the very dynamic of that particularity which makes it a particularity of the totality*. In other words, by its specificity, the gender distinction, male dominance, exists as determination (particularity) of capital as ongoing contradiction.^{*} Capital as ongoing contradiction (the problem with labor) doesn't exist in the form of the relationship between men and women; to the contrary, it's the *gender distinction* and the *contradiction between men and women* such as they exist in the capitalist mode of production which create the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women as determinations of capital as ongoing contradiction.

If women (and as we will soon see, the family) are a problem for capital it isn't only because labor is a problem for capital, but because the activity of women *who do not want to remain what they are* is a problem. To see only the “problem expressed in a form”, we would only have an abstract unity, abstract because *self-determination* as the form of the gender relation which only achieves the existence of a mask (the problem of labor exists in the form of....). The form is not more than one appearance.

^{*} It is difficult but imperative to abandon a behaviourist understanding of the contradiction between men and women, an understanding which is composed of a sum of individual practices and psychology. The contradiction between men and women is not measured in the balance between shared household chores and slaps. “Reproduction is the foundation of the social relation of the sexes” (Paola Tabet : *L'arraisonnement des femmes*). The ground, the substance, and the dynamic of the contradiction between men and women can, in the capitalist mode of production, develop for themselves. Its dynamic, on the ground of this reproduction, is labor in the capitalist mode of production: always necessary, always in excess. The contradiction between men and women does not merge with the class struggle, but the pairing is not random, neither theoretically or historically.

Let us address the specific content of the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women as particularity of the totality. Let us expose here, in an inevitably simplistic way, the architecture of the reasoning.

- As in the text of TC 23, we established the group women starting from surplus labor and the population as principal productive force. We add that what we took for granted, surplus labor and necessary population, requires firstly the more or less violent ascription of women to their definition, a reduction to their reproductive capacity. “Reproductive capacity” is not “given” and “used”, it is constructed and appropriated (see the “responses” to the first two questions).
- In all this, the categories of the CMP (capitalist mode of production) are sexed. Labor, and population of course. And also, the wage relation : the separation of production and reproduction ; reproduction in the sphere of circulation ; payment not of labor but of the reproduction of labor power and of the “race of workers”. But also, the distinction of labor, property, exchange. On this latter point, the market seems neutral in relation to the gender because the market is not neutral in relation to gender. In a mode of production where all production is destined for sale, the market defines the social character of this production as public, therefore the gender distinction could be considered non-pertinent internally, because it is presupposed in the very existence of the thing.*

* There is still a necessity to show the specifically character of each category. However when the finger points at the moon, it's the moon at which we should gaze, not the finger. Thus, they are not the concepts of value, the market, or the division of labor which should be critiqued because they are sexed, but the reality which is realized adequately *by and through* these categories.

- The sexed character of all categories of capital signifies a *general* distinction in society between men and women. This general distinction acquires as its social content that which is the synthesis of all the sexuations of the categories: the creation of the division between public and private. This distinction is the synthesis because the CMP is a *political* economy. In other words, the CMP, because it rests on the sale of the labor power and a social production that does not exist as such on the market (value), rejects as “non-social” the moments of its own reproduction which escape direct submission to the market or to the immediate process of production : the private. The private is the private of the public, always in a hierarchical relation of definition and submission to the public. As general division and given its content (socially produced), it is naturalized and it actually exists in the framework of this society as natural division: all women, all men. It is not enough to say that all the categories of the capitalist mode of production are intrinsically sexed. It is necessary also that this general sexuation is given a particular form: the distinction between public and private where the categories men and women appear as general, more general even than the differences of class which are produced as “social” and “natural.” The distinction between men and women acquires its own content at its level, specific to the level produced, which is to say, specific to the distinction between public and private: nature (that which the social has produced at the interior of itself as non-social and which actually comes to appear as obvious, natural, because of the anatomical distinction). The distinction between men and women as relation wouldn’t be a social relation without “appearing” as natural, as a commodity wouldn’t be a social relation without appearing as a thing, or the wage, the value of the work force, without appearing as the “price of labor”. Denaturalization is only possible when you take naturalization seriously. The authoritative definition of woman was the biology of social “naturalism”. This biologi-

zation has some actual effects on the m/w relation, and on the nature of it's overcoming.

- The public/private distinction shows that, in the capitalist mode of production, the definition of women is globally constrained to their role as childbearers. For instance, one does not move (either logically or socially) from the appropriation of women as reproducers to domestic labor. Domestic labor is an element of the social device [dispositif] that defines and assigns the group "women" to this reproductive capacity. Domestic labor, positioned within the division of labor, forms of integration/interpellation [insertion] in the immediate process of production, "atypical" forms of the wage system, everyday violence of marriage, family, negation and appropriation of female sexuality, rape and/or the threat of rape, all these are the frontlines where the contradiction between men and women plays out, a contradiction whose content is the definition of men and women and the ascription and confinement of individuals to these definitions (none of these elements is accidental). These frontlines are the loci of a permanent struggle between two categories of society constructed as natural and deconstructed by women in their struggle. The frontlines are never stable. The public-private distinction is constantly redefined: the present "parity" is a redefinition of its boundaries but also a redefinition of what is private.
- If the abolition of the gender distinction is necessary from the point of view of the "success" of communization, it is not in the name of the abolition of all the mediations of society. It is in its concrete and immediate character that the contradiction between men and women, imposes itself on the "success" of communization", against what that relation implies in terms of violence, invisibilisation, the ascription to a subordinate position. If the abolition of the gender distinction becomes necessary for communization, it is because the

contradiction and exploitation which define women exist in everyday life and from this situation, from this contradiction, we begin to talk of the necessity of the abolition of gender. The gender distinction that is the contradiction between men and women as it exists and takes place allows us to speak of its necessary abolition and of the necessary abolition of all the mediations for the “success” of communization. If we analyze the gender distinction from the point of view of its abolition, it is because we begin with its current material existence. From whence, the following point.

- It is the very dynamic of this contradiction that makes the contradiction exist as a particularity of the totality which is capital as ongoing contradiction. *Women do not want to remain what they are*, as Marx wrote about the proletarians in *The German Ideology*. If they do not want to remain what they are, it is because their situation is a contradiction within and for the capitalist mode of production: labor as problem (the “apparent contradiction”, population as principal productive force, is no longer self evident in capitalism, the natural distinction is undermined by contingency). But, labor as a problem doesn’t *take the form* of the struggle of women, labor as problem is the struggle of women against their definition as women. One can say that the tendential fall in the rate of profit is not “the basis” of the class struggle but directly a contradiction between capital and proletariat. One can say that labor (or the population, principal productive force) as a problem (the “apparent contradiction”) *is directly a contradiction between men and women*.
- Labor as a problem is the very dynamic of the contradiction between men and women (it does not merely take the form of this contradiction), labor as a problem is the dynamic through which this particularity exists as a particularity *of the totality* : Capital as ongoing contradiction. Capital as ongoing con-

tradition doesn't determine itself as a double contradiction: between men and women on the one hand, and between capitalists and proletarians on the other. Unity as living, active unity, is the necessary relation between the two contradictions by which the unity makes them its own and acts as their unity.

- The necessary relation between these two contradictions is at first, historically, an experiential fact. The activity of women in the class struggle always introduces within itself the contradictory relation of women to men: the refusal to be relegated to the subaltern tasks or to tasks associated with their social role in "private"; the outbreak of the private into the public sphere as a transgression of their separation; the pleasure of being together for example during an occupation; the sexuality which haunts all female acts within the class struggle, whether it be the presence of militia women on the frontlines in Spain, or during a strike with occupation for days and nights (one could say that *de facto* women's struggle spontaneously takes the form of an emancipation). More specifically, women's struggles against the appropriation of their time, of their person, of their body (only women have a body, "are a body") also invoke the class distinction in a perpendicular fashion, both unifying and cleaving the distinctions between "bourgeois women" and "proletarian women". In the same way, it also cuts across the struggles for equality of conditions and of rights. The "household worker" can feel threatened by this freedom and this equality as she doesn't have the cultural and social capital needed in order to validate this "freedom". It is quite easy and trivial to show that exploitation, the contradiction between proletariat and capital, defines capital as ongoing contradiction. (*Théorie Communiste* has long shown this). But exploitation is not conceived as a particularity of the totality, but as an immediate identity with the totality of capital as ongoing contradiction. The gender distinction and

the men/women contradiction in its specific content and in all its frontlines are not acknowledged like the other particularities of this totality: in their difference and their unity.

- We are thus, for an instant, in the presence of two contradictions which each exist as particularities of the totality *on account of their specificity*. In all this, this totality is nothing but their necessary relation, or rather, as necessary relation they exist inevitably conjoined, as capital as ongoing contradiction (or contradiction between surplus labor and necessary labor). If each of these contradictions exists as a particularity of the totality, and is this particularity because of a specific dynamic, this means that capital as ongoing contradiction is their unity. Unity in which contradictions do not exist insofar as they are conceived apart from their unity. The current solution to the problem is to say that each intersects with the other, and this amounts to saying that they exist together without saying why nor how, without producing and deducing their “co-existence”. This is the problematic of the “complexity” which contents itself with coexistence *without unity*. To say that each contradiction intersects with the other is not false, but it is necessary to conclude that they do not exist insofar as they exist independently, they intersect and conjugate antagonistically (antagonistically: in the class struggle it is not irrelevant whether a proletarian is male or female, because the proletariat is male) as a single movement : capital as ongoing contradiction. Woman, man: proletarian, capitalist, no subject is pure. Each contradiction in its specificity doesn’t disappear, but it is *internally* (as particularity of the same totality) prevented from recognizing *the other as its own*. It matters that there are two contradictions and four terms—it’s for this reason that the dynamic is unique, that of capital as ongoing contradiction and of its overcoming.

- The contradiction between men and women doesn't erupt within the class contradiction, but modulates it constantly in the same way that exploitation constantly modulates the contradiction between men and women. Their entanglement constitutes a succession of historical configurations in the class struggle as well as a succession of historical configurations of the contradiction between men and women. The struggle of *women who do not want to remain who they are* has a history: from the demands for equality of civil and political rights, the demands for equality in work, to the calling into question of their own definition (in 1970's feminism, where the body itself becomes the object of demands and social critique) which overcomes the paradox of feminism as articulated by Joan. W. Scott.* It is false to say that the class struggle, or its overcoming, depends on the contradiction between men and women—just as it would be false to say that the overcoming of the categories men and women depends on the class struggle. They are particularities of the same totality insofar as they are specific contradictions (by their specificity, the whole is not self-determining), they are constantly constructing and are constructed by one and the same movement (inside of which their entangled and antagonistic relationship is always historically specific) of a succession of cycles of struggles (class struggle/ gender contradiction, and one on account of the other) always historically defined. *Two contradictions, four elements, but one single movement, one single dynamic*, that of capital as ongoing contradiction. Through this, each contradiction by its specificity exists as particularity of the totality (the “self-determination of the whole” is a speculative trap). The struggles that constitute these cycles are always the antagonistic entanglement (the class struggle is always related to

* To demand equality and the absence of difference in name a group and by the action of a group which we have defined as private [particulier]. (Joan W. Scott *La citoyenne paradoxale* ; titre original *Only paradoxes to offer* Harvard University Press, 1996)

the general contradiction between men and women, just as the latter is always connected to the cleavage between classes) of the contradictions between classes and genders

- Particularities of one totality insofar as they are specific contradictions (by their specificity, the whole is not self-determined) build and are built constantly by each other as a single movement (inside of which their antagonistic entanglement is always historically specific) of the succession of cycles of struggles (class struggles/ gender contradiction, and one because of the other) which are always historically defined. *Two contradictions, four elements, but one single movement, one single dynamic*, that of capital as ongoing contradiction. Each contradiction exists in its specificity as a particularity of this totality (the speculative trap is the self-determination of the whole). Struggles which constitute these cycles are always, if considered in the *unique dynamic* of capital as ongoing contradiction, the antagonistic entanglement (the struggle of classes always has issues with the general contradiction between men and women, while the latter always has issue with the division of the classes) of class and gender contradictions.
- If considered as particularities of the same totality, do these two contradictions have the same relation to this totality? In other words, are the contradictions heirarchized in their relation to the whole? Yes, in the course of their history. No, in terms of their overcoming of there shared totality. The sexed character and sexed hierarchy of capital's categories, the very definition of the group woman and its subordination to the private, mean that the contradiction between men and erupt on the *public* scene as the intermediary of the contradiction between classes. It's always during the crisis of social reproduction that the *unity of these two contradictions is brutally and publicly re-established*[†]. The struggles of women (comrades *but*

[†] We take here again a "dialectical model," used by Marx in relation to the passage

women) are neither useful nor useless “for the class struggle” — they exist, whether or not they are taken into consideration, and they had better be taken into consideration. It will then depend on their particular historical aggregation to know if their antagonistic entanglement is for each one the sign of the impossibility of its overcoming (programmatism) or the possibility of their common overcoming (i.e. communization)

Let us move on to the family. Here also the subject must be treated in its specificity, and we do not situate ourselves at the same level as when we deal with the definition of women. To treat it in its specificity means that it is in the very terms of the family we find “labor as problem” is expressed. The cause cannot be treated as an exterior phenomenon applied to inert matter, but as a movement inherent to this matter.

It would be necessary to begin by analyzing the formation of the family in the generalization of the market based and capitalist economies, between the 16th and 18th centuries. This formation of the family has a stake in the formation of a *political economy** (cf above and on top of public/private). As Polanyi would say: a dis-embedding of the family in the sphere of production and of its communal environment. This is accompanied by a surge of feelings and love in the western world. For all of its long history,

from the possibility to the reality of crisis: « Les économistes qui nient la crise s'en tiennent uniquement à l'unité de ces deux phases (phase de production et phase de circulation, nda). Si elles étaient uniquement séparées sans être unes (“sans faire un tout” – traduction Rubel dans Ed. Pléiade, t.2, p.478), c'est alors précisément qu'il n'y aurait pas de possibilité d'établir de force leur unité (“le rétablissement violent de leur unité serait impossible” — idem), pas de possibilité de crise. Si elles étaient uniquement unes (“si elles faisaient un tout” — idem), sans être séparées, il n'y aurait pas de possibilité de les séparer de force (“leur séparation violente serait impossible” — idem), ce qui est encore la crise. La crise c'est l'établissement par la force de l'unité entre des moments promus à l'autonomie (“unité faite de moments individualisés” — idem) et l'autonomisation par la force de moments qui sont essentiellement uns (“de moments qui font essentiellement un tout” — idem) » (Théories sur la plus-value, Ed. Sociales, t.2, p.612).

* To reflect naively on the expression *political economy* is a contradiction in terms. It is only in the 17th century that « political » began to be added to « economy ».

the capitalist family is between two contradictory necessities: for one, the capital wants only free individuals, without attachments—on the other hand, it separates public from private more radically than other modes of production because it has made the force of labor a commodity. The capitalist history of the family moves within this contradiction.

This contradiction is initially a contradiction in the family between men and women, a contradiction then between the tendency of capital to absorb the totality of the available labor power into the reproduction of labor power centered around the reproduction of the male labor power of the head of the family (inherent tendency of the wage system). This reproduction as addition of the individual labor powers present in the family, is a contradiction, in the end, between the private character of reproduction of labor power, and its production as any commodity in a specific capitalist process of production, i.e. as an *objective* condition of production. This is all that, in the terms of the family, “labor is a problem” for capital.

* * *

Public/private, wage relation, and feminine domestic labor are closely interdependent. In the capitalist mode of production, the public and private spheres are radically separated, the exclusion of women in public space is fundamentally more radical than in previous modes of production at the same time as the universality of abstract equality between individuals is an interior force of this mode of production.

By removing the distinction of *sex*, the law (the state) does not abolish the *genders*, but merely declares that its effects are not politically pertinent and that they can be forgotten. On one side the law claims to establish true equality of the sexes as a *public* affair, but it makes the gender division into a non-political dif-

ference (non-public), which can no longer be the object of a critique or a transformation. In becoming equal, the State or the public sphere in general does not abolish the gender distinction, but rather *presupposes it* by arranging it in the private sphere on the side of concrete *men* and *women*. The State and the public sphere are fundamentally constructed on the gender distinction in which they redouble this distinction by declaring it non-pertinent internally and actually pertinent for its very existence. The State and the public sphere do not have an internal need for the difference of sex, they can, on the contrary, abstract from this difference because in it (as such: public/private) is realized the actual foundation of the difference of gender.

The legal declaration of parity and its real application go hand in hand with the interior split [*dédoublément*] of each woman. As a member of the public sphere, she is relieved of the pertinence of sex difference, she is stripped of her real life and filled with an unreal generality. As woman in the private sphere and private relations of production, she remains a woman precisely because the parity is no more than an abstraction, which is to say, the parity is not something which doesn't exist, but something which exists precisely as an abolition (in tendency/ achieved) of a difference, *abolition founded on the reproduction of this difference and on the decoupling and the scission of the female individual*. In actual capitalist society, women are actually divided in each determination (domestic life, work, parenting...) between an abstract individuality and a concrete individuality at the point which each determination of concrete life (private and work) is itself divided between its reality and its ideality, so much so that the ideality (the parity in all the domains) appears as real in the distinction which it has abolished (in itself). An unfounded "archaism" and by there unreal, whereas it is only the interior split of each woman. Man is also divided between abstract and concrete, but he does not need to abandon the concrete in the abstract (as man).

“The privilege which man holds... is that his vocation of being human does not thwart [contrarie] his destiny of being male. By assimilation of the phallus and of transcendence, he finds that his social or spiritual successes endow him with manly prestige. His is not divided. While it is demanded that women, to accomplish her femininity, become object and prey, to renounce her claims of sovereign subject.” (Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, t.1, p. 524)

The woman lives her life, insofar as it is “universal”, in the parity, but if she lives it, she contemplates it also. She carries out her private, personal life in her practical, domestic, professional activities, which are themselves split. All her life is divided, because she needs to be the same as that which is different from her (and as the difference establishes the demand to be the same). As a woman, this individual is commanded to be a *self* and an *other*, and confirmed as different in the injunction to be the same.

The distinction is carried out in parity. The illusion which should be shown is not the idealization of the sex difference within parity, but its source: the determination of a public sphere which, avoided by the colors of parity, counters in its own place the reality of inequality and domination.

Equality is battle for women’s access to abstraction. It is not a battle empty of issues, but its triumph presupposes and confirms each woman’s split in the totality of her life, and makes everyday life into a simple fact without right and without reason. Equality (insofar it as constitutes an abstract individual) as ideality rests on the reality of this “everyday life” which is necessarily the abstract expression of the private/public distinction. Abstraction which becomes the reading and the practice of concrete life (everyday life). Abstraction is not the name of a separation from a “real base”, it is the name of the role it plays there: the role of abstraction (cf. money).

Liberal ideology (in the political sense) is adequate to the immediate reality and given in social life, while disguising a deeper reality. It makes of the individual an essence, a constituent subject. Woman, in the equal pair man/woman, is such an individual in which the abstract individual, objectively abstract, is confused with the concrete individual, so much so that the former becomes not only the ideal form of the second, but also returns the concrete individual to a contingent, accidental form of this abstract, objective individual.

* * *

Capitalism delineates productive labor absolutely separated from reproductive activities in the private sphere. The free labor power which make productive labor must *go and be sold*. The cleavage between production and reproduction, of home and workplace, is perfect, structural, definitive of the mode of production. The marital family is the family of the free laborer, with due respect to Engels. Domestic space is socially delineated as an exclusion and imprisonment. Women can enter in the labor market, but on the basis of this exclusion. Their entrance into the labor market, their participation in productive labor, is always defined as the work of “those which exist in this way” and by which the value of labor power is devalued.

Capital has a problem with female labor because if it is eager to integrate women directly to its service, this will influence the relation between necessary and surplus labor through the value of labor power. For this reason, capital is always in an antagonistic and ambivalent relation to female work.

Capital has at its disposal three ways to usurp domestic labor-time, either by leaving it the way it is, as housework (in this case, it usurps insofar as reduction in the part of the working day which is comprised by necessary labor), or by absorbing this time (in

other words, absorbing women), in which case necessary labor time will increase in the long term, or finally by combining both, winning on both sides. This third solution is of course preferred by the capitalist, but in this case capital would have to incessantly compose through female labor, in a diachronic manner, in the re-division of salaried work in the individual duration of the life of each worker, what is considered in the synchronic fashion a cutting up of female employment in age groups. For more than 20 years, the 'solution' has been part time work, imposed in the vast majority of cases. The solution has been the international migration of women to do work related to *care*.

Cooking for the family is not considered *free productive labor* on account of the fact that cooking can be bought (any more than changing the oil in the car). It is wrong to think that *work must be paid*. However, if there is not, in the family setting, *unpaid productive labor*, then from the nature of the wage itself, the family is a place of economic exploitation, that of women which immediately benefits the spouse, which is to say men in general. We have here an exploitation which passes for a relation of domination which rises from the wage : domination and supply of domestic labor are forms firstly dependent on surplus labor and, secondly, on the form of the wage relation.

To say that wages pay the reproduction of labor power and of the "race of workers" makes us cross the threshold of "intimacy". Only a non-programmatic theory of class struggle and a theory of revolution as abolition of all classes, as abolition of the proletariat and the wage system can take into account the *antagonism included in the wage as reproduction of labor power* and even more, consider that this internal antagonism is and must be a determinant element in the abolition of the wage system.

* * *

The content of the construction of the capitalist family is the history of the wage system, and its decomposition in direct and indirect wages—in brief the integration and the reproduction of labor power as collective and social force in the cycle of capital. In other words, the future of capital in the specifically capitalist mode of production. One could also describe this process as one of a relation between business and reproduction of the assemblage of capitalist society; the relation between the two first moments of exploitation and the third.

The first effect of industrialization is to augment “exploitable human material”, which is not inevitably exploited, and to elevate the degree of exploitation.

“The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour-market, spreads the value of the man’s labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour-power. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour-power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days’ labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus-labour of four over the surplus-labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now, not only labour, but expend surplus-labour for the capitalist.” (Capital Vol 1, New World Books edition, p 395).

The mechanization of modern industry universalizes “exploitable human matter” because it is no longer tributary of anything other than the capitalist relation itself in order to be exploitable. It is no longer an agent of trade, and for a prior social history, it suffices that it is free. Any individual is then presupposed as

an integral part of this exploitable human matter and belongs, in his freedom, to capital, before even, individually, his labor power enters in a particular labor process. This is the beginning of a process in which all the individual labor powers become independent and in which *globalisation of their reproduction is not familial but social*. The result is that the current labor market in which the addition of family revenue, when the family system persists (it is no longer a condition of the reproduction of labor power) is not the final instance of the reproduction of each of these components, but a simple median term put in relation to reproduction of the individual labor power and the global reproduction of the global force of social labor.

Up until the end of the 19th century, fluctuations of employment, “accidents of life”, and the brief rearing of children until the time when they can be productive, are “regulated” by the individual foresight of the worker, some mutual aid societies, charity, begging, and illegal activities, and also by the paternalism of the bosses. There is also still the possibility of taking refuge in the countryside, enlarging the family, worker nomadism, and for women the regulation of their activities through marriage. “Even as citizens, the artisan and their workers continue to live in perfect symbiosis with the rural. No clear border separates the workshop from its environment. (...) This isn’t only true for the cottage industry. Manufacturing itself, in the beginning, is strongly subject to the law of the cultural and social rural hegemony.” (Jacques Le Goff, *Du silence à la parole : droit du travail, société, Etat, 1830-1985*, Ed La Digitale, p. 26).

The first mode of adaptation leads to the dispersal of manufacturing, the extension of the putting-out system, to which the factory system is opposed from the 18th century on, the factory system. Nevertheless, even in this case it must adapt itself to peasants who are in the factory only to round out their income, and leave immediately as soon as the agricultural work requires them

to leave, or as soon as they feel like they have enough money to survive. The rebellion of the national workshops in June 1848 in Paris, with the influx of unemployed workers coming from the country, marks nonetheless the *emergence* of a working class that does not benefit from the ability to take refuge in the country.

Little by little, the small domestic workshops disappear and give way to the big manufacturing establishments. At the same time, the latter close themselves off from the rural environment—externally and materially with the birth of industrial architecture, and internally through the disciplining of labor. (cf. J.P De Gaudemar, *L'ordre et la production*, Ed Dunod ; et Gérard Noiriel, *Les ouvriers dans la société française XIX^e s – XX^e s*, Ed Le Seuil.).

As waged labor becomes generalized, and as its relationship to capital becomes its very principle of renewal, the working class becomes a legal subject. In France the 1864 strike laws and the 1884 legalization of unions, the working class as a collective worker begins to take the place of an aggregate of individual isolated workers. It is only gradually that the working class becomes defined by waged labor and the labor market. The social modalities of the reproduction of labor power become formalized with the labor contract at the same time that the specifically capitalist family becomes formalized. The wage system becomes *really and explicitly* the reproduction of social labor force and of the “race of workers”, it gives the family a specifically capitalist content. Through the evolution of the wage system in direct and indirect wages, this particularly capitalist construct of the family as a place which is exclusively devoted to the reproduction of the work force becomes the subordinate place of women in specifically capitalist terms and relationships. The social process is substantial with the formation of a worker identity which marks this period of capitalism. The worker identity is constituted as a masculine identity: the male worker employed full time in mod-

ern industry. It is through the formation of the wage system in direct and indirect wages, that workers identity appears through this central figure. The male worker employed full time become the subject of rights applied to its reproduction by which the family is now defined.

With the appearance of the “collective worker”, that is, the definition and determination of social labor in capitalist society, the wage doesn’t change fundamentally, but the elements which determine it break apart. The wage is always fixed around the value of the reproduction of labor power, it must also allow for the constant entrance of new proletarians on the market, but now capital must also be concerned with this reproduction and not just send it back to the country (“exteriors”) and therefore consider it as having no cost.

What is new at the beginning of the 20th century, is that that part of the wage devoted to the renewal, which ensures the maintenance of the workforce, becomes autonomous from direct wages, and becomes something that is planned. The social character of the reproduction of the working class becomes autonomous in relation to the individual workers, and becomes “social”. The social takes locates itself in a particular space between politics and economics. The social character of the reproduction of labor power as a whole, in becoming autonomous from the individual worker, no longer depends directly on his immediate work, nor even on the fact that as an individual, he works. But at the same time as these old forms of regulation become obsolete, the “social” creates a new form, which is applied to the family.

The model of the labor contract of the male adult worker takes hold in modern urban industry. Married women and youth take the subordinate role in the relation to the head of the family : if the husband works, the woman does not have the right to unemployment benefits. Demands formulated in terms of “social

rights” took these categories as a point of departure, thereby consolidating the distinction between workers and the unemployed, of men and women, between youth and adults. The “social rights” accentuate the discriminations between sex, age, sectors of the working class, professions, and completion of the process of state-formation and of the production of the family as the re-producer of labor power.

A politics of organization and of rational management of the workforce takes shape, within which the family plays a central role. The wage, established by collective bargaining, escapes the individual worker. It implies a *mediator*—the union delegate. The indirect wage also escapes the individual worker, and implies a *mediation*—the family, of which the worker is both the representative and the chief, insofar as the family must, as a social space, ensure his reproduction.

Since the mid- 1970’s and the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, all the changes in employment and the labor market have had as their goal and content the imposition of unemployment, precarity, and flexibility in the heart of wage labor. The system that segments labor power and creates categories is targeted towards populations produced as particularities in particular zones (neighborhoods, towns, ghettos). Thus, more and more categories crystallize within the available global workforce, and politics are increasingly differentiated in their relation to wage labor. At the beginning of the 70’s, with the restructuring of the labor market into increasing heterogeneity and segmentation of labor power, those who were “excluded” are considered and constructed as a residual population in relation to the general logic of the relation between employment and unemployment.

At the heart of the crisis of the first phase of the real subsumption of work to capital is the failure of what is often referred to as the “Keynesian deal” or the “Fordist compromise.” What is

relevant here is the collapse of the politics of full employment and the pseudo-“sharing” of the gains of increasing productivity. The collapse of the male, waged model of full time employment at a consistent place of work, is accompanied by the increase of female labor, of part time labor, (female labor and part time labor tend to be associated with one another) of temporary work, of the dispersal of the factory, of subcontracting, in other words, of a proliferation of intermediary situations. The accumulation of capital was no longer confined to the national sphere, each State can therefore no longer consider the wage “as an investment” according to the Fordist formula. Work and value of the labor power become a variable of adjustment of external competition. Any politics oriented towards jump-starting the economy or a social wage for unemployment is condemned. It was the epoch of Barre, Thatcher, and Reagan. All the social models, the dynamic modalities of exploitation of the workforce and its reproduction, deployed pretty much everywhere in the developed capitalist world during the 30s and immediately post-war, disappear.

In general, it is the exteriorization of the social, outside of the direct relation of exploitation of labor, that *tends* to disappear in the contemporary situation. The solidification of the situation of the waged laborer, its irreversibility and the socialization of its reproduction, have broken, in the framework of real subsumption, the interiorization in the workplace of the fluctuations of activity and employment (paternalism pushed this to such an extreme that it became a caricature), where sending back the fluctuations which were extremely exterior to the immediate capitalist relation of exploitation (return to the countryside, withdrawal to the family, etc.) the worker now has to deal with these things, and he does so through his nomadism and individual or mutual prudence, planning for the future. In the first phase of real subsumption, the *social* is externalized as national politics, dealt with collectively and socially, it is exteriorized without businesses or

individual people, it takes the form of social rights guaranteed by the State and the social institutions and defines the family as its

The current phase of capitalist development puts the reproduction of labor power back into labor, as a form of its perpetuation and its execution.

There is a logic of the “activation of social welfare,” the objective of which is to promote progressive social security taxes, while limiting the decreasing scale of the transfers, through *in work benefits* intended to make up for the “welfare trap.”

In the United States: Welfare reform, which began being applied in 1997, institutes the principle of the conditionality, which means that any person profiting from social security must deserve it.

« Celle-ci n'est plus un droit, elle doit avoir une contrepartie : son bénéficiaire devra exercer une activité salariée, effectuer une tâche d'intérêt général, ou recevoir une formation. Tout adulte dont la famille perçoit une aide devra, dans les deux mois, effectuer un travail d'intérêt général. Le principe d'universalité et d'automatisme du versement de l'aide sociale est ainsi supprimé. Chaque Etat est libre de distribuer à sa guise le montant de l'enveloppe qu'il percevra du gouvernement fédéral. Avec cette condition : en 2002, les Etats doivent être en mesure de prouver qu'environ 50% de leur “clientèle” du *Welfare* est au travail. Sinon, ils perdront une portion non négligeable de la dotation fédérale. Entre janvier 1993 et novembre 1996, 2,5 millions de bénéficiaires du *Welfare* ont été rayés des registres. En supposant que les deux tiers des bénéficiaires d'aides sociales trouvent du travail et que les Etats maintiennent leur niveau de financement, ce sont, avec la nouvelle loi, 2,6 millions de personnes qui vont tomber en

* The theory of the “welfare trap,” “poverty trap,” or “unemployment trap,” argues that in some cases getting a job with wages subject to tax and government levy can disadvantage a person more than staying at home, unemployed.

dessous du seuil de pauvreté (32,4 millions d'Américains, soit 13,5% de la population entrent déjà dans cette catégorie). On imagine aisément les conséquences d'un brusque ralentissement de la croissance économique. Le test du succès de la réforme est donc moins dans la réduction du nombre d'abonnés de l'aide sociale (le principe de la conditionnalité à un effet dissuasif) que dans *la capacité de l'économie à leur fournir des emplois permanents*. De quels emplois s'agit-il ? De nombreuses entreprises ont répondu à cet effort de solidarité nationale en mettant en place des programmes dits *welfare-to-work*. » (*Le Monde* du 13 mai 1997).

« Les principaux effets de la réforme résident dans le passage d'un assistanat chronique à des formes de *précarité par le travail* (*working poverty*) » (David Giband, *Géographie sociale des Etats-Unis*, Ed. Ellipses 2006, p.53).

There are many examples of this evolution of welfare politics. Great Britain was a pioneer on the matter. This evolution goes along with the development of all the forms of employment and the putting to work of the proletariat, which is the extinction of the worker identity. For example: one new relationship constituted between, on the one side, the externalization of unemployment to the level of remuneration by paritarian institutions[†] and the relief put in the charge of the state, and the other its internalization of part-time work, the temporary work, etc. The localized management of unemployment and the individualization of the labor contract assured the connection between the two. An evolution in which, importantly, temporary work and precaritization play essential roles.

This *re-internalization of welfare* in the effectuation of labor involves the externalized but internally split "social" applying itself specifically to the family. And the pregnant american teenagers

[†] Paritarian institutions are non-profit joint institutions composed of representatives of both employees and employers. (translator's note).

have nothing to do but work... or pretend to work. The family can shatter or present itself in all sorts of more or less ephemeral forms, because it no longer houses a *clot* in the social reproduction of the force of labor, but instead, it is home to a clotting of the coexistence (simple addition) of individualized segments of this reproduction: a child at school, another in temporary work, an adult unemployed, a woman in part time work, a RMIste, a salaried, full time worker. Each of these positions has its own logic, the ensemble no longer organizes according to a central figure for which it reproduces. There is no longer an ensemble.

All the individual labor powers become independent. In the current labor market, the family contribution of revenues persists alongside the acknowledgment of the family situation, but the family unit is no longer the synthesis of reproduction of each of its components. Rather, it is a simple medium* connecting reproduction of the individual forces of labor to the general reproduction of the social labor power.

The purchase of labor power by capital is now total. Labor power is presupposed both as the *formal* property of capital (workers always belonged to the capitalist class as a whole before selling their labor power to a specific capital), and also the *real* property of capital: capital pays for the individual reproduction of the worker independently of its immediate consumption which, for *each labour power*, is only the manifestation of its definition as a fraction, a mere aliquot part, of this general labor power that already belongs to capital. Capital did not all of a sudden become philanthropist. In each worker, it reproduces something that belongs to it: the general productive force of labor, which is independent and exterior to each worker and even to the sum of workers. Conversely, labor power which is directly active, productively consumed, sees its necessary labor returning to it as an individualized fraction, which is not defined exclusively by

* A place where the differences co-exist but are not integrated.

the needs of its own reproduction, but also by the fact that it is a fraction of general labor power (representing the totality of necessary labor)— a fraction of the total necessary labor. *There is a trend towards the equalization between income as wages and income as unemployment benefits*— there being an institutional contagion of each one toward the other.

Capital first came up against this aggregation of labor power and the labor necessary for it during the first phase of real subsumption. Capital first divided it into rigid categories, because it did not succeed in integrating it, consuming it and reproducing it as a social labor power. The family, as the social sphere where all of the different stages in the life of labor power are represented synchronically, was the synthesis of these categories. This very division now finds a continuity in the *interpenetration of its elements* rather than the synchronic synthesis. First there is repulsion, exclusion between these different categories; and reunion, synthesis outside them: the family. But at the same time, their mutual attraction as identical things eventually gets the upper hand.

The family is the sphere where this more or less necessary individualization takes place, and little more. The fraction given individually to each labor power as is a mere aliquot part of a total value, which is the value of necessary labor, paid by capital regularly (at fixed intervals). The duration for which a specific labor power is used, the rotation of the fractions put at work, the forms of payment can be endlessly fractioned: the primary purchase has already taken place; the ownership contract has already been signed. Naturally, all this implies the full development of the specific conditions allowing the extraction of relative surplus-value (that is, the previous period)

This purchase which is total because it is individualized, and which is individualized because it is total, makes the “explosion of the family” an undeniable fact, but at the same time as it is fall-

ing apart, it is reshaping. Capital needs an atomized proletariat, but the flexibility and precariousness which necessitate the total “freedom” of the proletariat (for example in terms of geographical mobility) transforms the family but does not do away with it. In the extreme case of the Special Economic Zones, which proliferate all over the world, celibacy is imposed and the reproduction of labor power is ignored. The latter, in fact, is left to social structures which are marginal to capital’s cycle of valorization. These structures are always extremely fragile and under threat: small peasant agriculture, informal economy, slums (reproduction is then considered by capital as being performed at no cost). And this, to be efficient, comes hand in hand with an accelerated rotation of the work force. Domestic work does not disappear, it must always be performed; flexibility, precariousness and part-time work are interconnected with domestic labor.

The number of single parent families has been continually growing. In 2005, in France (and the same phenomenon can be seen to a large extent in the US), 18% of children live with only one parent (which means as well, let’s not forget, that 82% of children live with both their parents). In 85% of the cases, these so called single-parent families are composed of one mother with her children (these data come from the newspaper *Le Monde*- 17 October 2008; they themselves use a study from Insee, a French institute of statistics and economic studies, published in June 2008). “The mothers in these single-parent families, who are often less qualified than those who live as couples, are in a fragile situation on the labor market. They must overcome the difficulties that are linked to their situation as single mothers – the issue of childcare in particular – and to the impossibility of relying on the income of a spouse to support the family (...) In those families, employment is often a scarce commodity: only one single mother out of two works full time” (*op. cit*) In fact, this “explosion” of the family, far from doing away with or overcoming the familial constraints on women, reproduce them and make them

worse. Poverty is gendered, that is to say, it affects predominantly women.

This growing poverty among women manifests a deep transformation of the way their appropriation takes place. The economic dependency of women, which is an element of the apparatus which ascribes them to reproduction, has as counterpart the appropriation of women through their private upkeep. It is difficult to assess the importance, analytical significance, and truth of the trends we find here. The complete appropriation of the reproductive person tends not to be the condition for reproduction any more. The marital relation of private appropriation tends to be called in question; the structures which controlled reproduction since the beginning of capitalism are crumbling. This private appropriation has a cost, in terms of the value of labor power, and it is no longer profitable. Social or rather collective appropriation tends to replace it and the reproductive woman becomes “a free person”, she becomes a pauper who can only survive thanks to her maintenance costs being collectively supported, provided she has children; and in case of a divorce, she will always be granted the “privilege” of child custody.

* * *

The family is a problem for the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism depends on the family in order to produce and reproduce its main element, which is labor power in the form of the free worker. But within the family, capital depends on modalities of production that it produces and subdues *but that are not immediately its own*. We have to turn to literature, for example to Huxley's *Brave New World*, to have an idea of what a capitalist production of labor power *according to a capitalist process of production* (that is, like any other commodity that enters the production process) could look like. But then the free worker would disappear and slavery would return.

A completely commodified society is the capitalist utopia. Society would then only be made up of a sum of individuals, absolutely independent from one another. All their relations would take the form of a contract, in which all action is recorded and paid for. All relations would be commodity relations, in which individuals would have no existence outside their legal abstraction: a total and totalitarian civil code. Each act would be measured, evaluated, exchanged and paid for. A capitalist utopia.

The family is an obstacle to the capitalist logic, but it is an *internal* obstacle, not something that the capitalist has inherited from history which it will eventually cast away. The total socialization of domestic work and of the biological reproduction of the worker is a programmatic utopia. It can be found in Guesde, in Pouget, but also in Lenin as a capitalist utopia integrated to the programmatic revolution. In the capitalist mode of production, it is always incomplete, and it always remains under the formal grip of the individual or the family, because the worker, in the capitalist mode of production, is a free worker. It means, according to its own definition, that her reproduction belongs to the sphere of circulation and not of production. The worker does not enter the production process as the machine or the raw material; if the reproduction of the worker no longer belonged to the sphere of circulation, she could only transfer her value in the production process, and there would no longer be variable capital or surplus-value. It also means that, if we say that the reproduction of the worker takes place in circulation, we should specify that it is in the “small circulation” which involves the part that is paid in wages and exchanged against labor power and which the worker transforms into means of consumption. This “small circulation” goes on parallel and at the same time as the production process and the “big circulation” which encompass the whole period from the moment when capital leaves production to the moment when it goes back to it (cf. Marx, *Grundrisse*). This “small circulation” gives to the reproduction of the worker a character which is

at the same time social (labor power is part of capital's conditions of existence) and private*: it takes place in parallel to the production process and to the "big circulation".

The populace in itself is not a commodity. The production and the reproduction of labor-power does not happen in the same way as those of a commodity. They occur as the production and reproduction of the worker as a person. If this is a limit or a contradiction for (or within) the capitalist mode of production, it is due to the very nature of the commodity, which is no different than that of the person of the worker. The reproduction of the worker reproduces the commodity labor-power in what is totally specific to it: the worker must reproduce the use-value of this commodity, labor, which is not distinct from them as a person. The worker brings their own skin to the market and has nothing to expect – but a tanning. It is in this sense that, in its own terms, in the forms of its existence and in its rationale, the family is "labor as a problem".

If the worker belongs to capital even before selling themselves to such or such capitalist, it is through a social relation of production, not a production process which produces the worker. The specificity of the commodity she must sell means that she herself has to bring it to the market and is responsible for its reproduction. Contrary to the slave, the free worker must take care of itself. It is in this interstice, essential but tenuous, constantly attacked by capitalism but that it cannot destroy, that the family, however broken it is, has its place in the capitalist mode of production. Capital works its way into private life and regulates its most intimate parts, it plans the number of births, it organizes illness and death, fills leisure time, produces tastes and feelings, as tools. In short, it produces this *historical social figure*: the *autonomous per-*

* "The worker's means of consumption leave the production process as a result and as a product, but they never enter it as such, because they are a finished product directly entering workers' consumption after the exchange (...). It is the only moment of the circulation of capital where consumption directly intervenes" (Marx, *Grundrisse*)

son who reproduces himself *for* capital. One of the tasks of this person is the *reproduction* of the population in the social framework defined by this *autonomy*: the family. Within it, there is no “property” of the children, just a delegation of power, which is the most economical form of breeding. Indeed, in its rationale, this specific social relation, the family, maintains and reproduces the domination on women, domination which is necessary for the free appropriation by capital of this whole labor of breeding and reproduction. The capitalist mode of production cannot abolish domestic labor, and it cannot abolish the gender division of humanity or the family: They are part of the very definition of this commodity which is so specific: labor power.

* * *

Capital comes up against the irreducible originality of this commodity: labor-power. Its *social* mode of reproduction must be *private*. On the one side, capital can only recognize the necessity of this private mode of reproduction (with is inherent to the wage relation) in order for the use-value of this commodity, living labor, to be the only use-value confronting it. But, on the other hand, the tendency that makes this use-value always superfluous is, for the family, its tendency to eliminate its private character, which is always an obstacle to exchange and to the maximal use of all the forces available for valorization. Here we come back to the notion of the overall purchase of labor power we mentioned before. It is a mobilization of all the forces available, integrating and modulating the diverse moments of their production and reproduction (training, unemployment, benefits “activating” the return to work, single parent benefits, etc...

In the fundamental conditions for the wage exchange (see Grun-
dricse), Marx insists on this point : « On both sides, there must be a free relation of exchange- monetary circulation- based on value and not on a relation of domination or of servitude. In oth-

er words, there must be a mediation between the two extremes (...) As it is not possible to directly get hold of the labor of others, it is necessary to buy labor-power from the worker in the exchange process.”

Have we now reached the possibility of “directly seizing the labor of others”, when the socialized forms of the wage secure a link between the worker and her subsistence (RSA, ASS[†], tax credit, “guaranteed income” ... and the fact of going back to work, not as a break in relation to these conditions but rather as their “activation”)? This incredible socialization of the overall reproduction of the total labor-power, which lubricates movement and eases the distinction between the wage and alternative sources of income, must be considered as capital calling into question the “free relation of exchange”, along with the family, as part of capital’s necessary self-presupposition. First, a calling into question of the “free relation of exchange” which ensures that the mediation between the two first “fundamental conditions” (labor-power in its purely subjective existence on one side, value or materialized labor on the other) takes place. Second, a calling into question of the family as the *private* moment in the reproduction, which is necessary to the free relation of exchange specifically because it is *private*. A calling into question of this free exchange that Marx considers an “essential formality”. In some extreme cases, which are at the same time neither atypical nor marginal, monetary circulation is even, in part, abolished, as for the French “working poor” who goes to the « Secours populaire » or to the « Restos du cœur »[‡], or for the American who gets food stamps.

* “The form of mediation inherent to the capitalist mode of production (the buying and selling of labor-power, author’s note) allows the perpetuation of the relation between capital which buys labor, and the worker who sells it, *but it is only formally distinct from the more or less direct modes of subjection and appropriation of labor by the owners of the conditions of production* (our emphasis)” (Marx, *Missing Sixth Chapter*)

† RSA and ASS are relatively new schemes of French unemployment benefits that, compared to the previous schemes, are putting a lot more pressure on the unemployed to find a job, and that allows them to receive some benefits while having a job. (translator’s note)

‡ Associations who offer free meals. (translator’s note)

Labor-power, the property of the worker, has become the property of capital which the worker must maintain and deliver at their owner's will. The worker does not "keep" their labor-power "while alienating it", but this relation itself holds its reversal: the worker alienates it and, in doing so, remains its "guardian".

The contract is then totally altered, together with the restructuring which took place from the middle of the 70s until the middle of the 90s. As we said, the endless segmentation of the diverse durations in the use of a particular labor-power, as well as the segmentation of its payment, the turnover of the fractions employed, means that the primary purchase *already took place*; the ownership contract was already signed. On the one hand, surplus-labor, while making necessary-labor superfluous, still needs it in order to grow. On the other hand, necessary labor is a condition for surplus-labor insofar as that surplus-labor eliminates it, makes it "superfluous". The contradiction between necessary labor and surplus-labor is a contradiction between necessary-labor and itself: it exists in order not to exist. Used or not, it has already been bought. With the overall purchase of labor-power, the labor market internalizes this contradiction of necessary labor (as continuity between the "indispensability" of labor and its "constant excess").

The family, as the physical space of the reproduction of labor-power, which used to have responsibility for the social function of reproduction, is reduced to be the receptacle of this addition. It is the intervention of the state which is the middle term between the two extremes: first, the individual labor-power and second, the available overall labor-power. The first is now only an aliquot part of the second. Its determinations (value, qualification) do not exist in themselves, in a primary way, in this individual labor-power. Individual labor power exists only as a fraction of this overall labor-power whose reproduction is socially fixed by capital, through the state. It first fixes labor powers formally-

rules of use- before really fixing labor power through its overall purchase. At the same time, the control that the social services impose on the poor is increasing: for example, the threat to take away the children if this new familial framework is “deficient”. The state, this middle term, reconstructs the family and controls it to make sure it is able to be this space of reproduction.

Is the worker still the “owner of its labor-power”? Because it socializes the exchange between labor-power and its productive consumption, capital calls into question its basis: the existence of the free worker and the existing place for its reproduction, the family.

The contradiction between surplus-labor and necessary-labor, the redefinition of the family, the transition from a private appropriation to a collective appropriation of women: all these are linked but are not one and the same. It is always in the terms appropriate to each case that “labor exists as a problem.”

Théorie Communiste

Pamela Swynford De Beaufort

THINGS WE'VE NOTICED

I

Patriarchy is a systematic social relation in which men get power, pleasure, leisure time, social capital, money, sandwiches, and so on, by exploiting and appropriating not-men.

These practices constituting the patriarchal relation—of control, and others, of violence, of surveillance, of discipline, of exploitation—are not especially important unto themselves. Not because they aren't cruel or hurtful (which, of course they are) but because patriarchy is a system that systematically extracts labor and value while simultaneously refusing those who are not men a position in the symbolic. That is, there is a specific form of identification and discursive integrity accessible only through being a (white) man.

This is not about the so-called biology called 'male', the dick or balls or whatever. It is the conspiracy that emerges among men. For instance, it has become a widespread practice in recent years for young men to sabotage their partner's birth control, typically by hiding or destroying pills. This isn't a question of biological reproduction—often the same men will force their partners to get abortions later on. Nor is it a plan concocted in locker rooms around the world—many men have clearly had this idea on their own. Rather, this is a singular instance of the patriarchal goal of total appropriation and control over the bodies of not-men espe-

cially indicative of a system of social relations that produces with meticulous consistency this kind of hyper-individualized control practice.

Of course, men are not the sole perpetrators of patriarchy. Gender is a process defined and redefined from moment to moment, but a process that bodies come to remember as time passes. Thus, it is clearly impossible to create some kind of pure community that exists outside patriarchy as long as patriarchy exists.

That said, the enactment and enforcement of patriarchy is based on violence, both historically and presently. This violence is not constituted solely by battery. It is much more nefarious, more omnipresent, than isolated acts of physical violence. It is a systematic social relation of force. This force is enacted by any and every gender; clearly there is no option not to participate in patriarchy, no matter one's ethics—but participating in patriarchy, for men, is benefiting from it.

2

We begin with an explanation of our use of the term *patriarchy*, a structural social relation predicated on the naturalization of a gender binary based on sexual difference. This constructed binary is patriarchy's primary organizing apparatus, through which it creates and naturalizes itself. Patriarchy itself, however, is the hierarchized and violent relation between these categories, an almost random slice of the systematic confluence of white supremacy, capital, and patriarchy that define our lives. That is, patriarchy does not function independently of these systems; indeed, the labeling of these relations as systems does disservice to the absolute fission of these relations over the past centuries.

What kind of material relations must be in place for patriarchy to congeal? It historically seems that the culture of sexual difference emerges through the division of labor between those who have

babies ('females') and those who engage in hunting, war, and other weapon-using activities ('males'), in part due to the long gestational period of homo sapiens which entails a certain labor of care, typically left to the same person who was previously pregnant. A monopoly of force and violence arises from this division of labor in the non-child-bearing population's total control over the weapons.

But, why do the 'males' (here, those who are more involved in hunting than babies) turn their weapons against 'females' (those who have or who are expected to produce children)? Silvia Federici points out that historically, a high birth-rate was understood as crucial to any expansion, growth, or profit. That is, primary accumulation does not only occur simultaneous to the appropriation of the womb's reproductive capacities, but this appropriation functions qua accumulation (*Caliban and the Witch*, 87). Thus, the creation of society *is* the appropriation of this reproductive capacity and thus females' exclusion from it, i.e. society. Thus what could be insignificant corporeal differences (bearing babies, breastfeeding) come to comprise the basis of a violently enforced hierarchical relation central to the development of what has become this world—both in terms of patriarchy, and the patriarchal underbelly of white supremacy and capitalism.

But we would never be so silly as to propose this as *the* origin story. Patriarchy exists as a multiplicity, not a monolith. The conversation of origins is always fucked up, pointing to a specific location and moment that always excludes other histories, both those in the past and those that have not yet occurred or been written. There is no absolute universal anything; any history purporting to be universal in any way is likely a history of the winners—which we freely admit to. The patriarchy that we know is the one that became white supremacist, became capitalist, perhaps because it was specifically terrible or especially exploitative.

The function of understanding origins is no longer even useful as an image of Eden; there is nothing to refer to, nothing to look at.

3

Patriarchy is not singular, at least, not anymore. Patriarchy does not function on its own, nor does white supremacy, nor does capital. These social relations—this social relation, singular—create(s) every subjectivity simultaneously, is always the underbelly to everything that goes on. In other words, you can *say* a möbius strip crosses itself, but it is a rhetorical joke, a play on words.

At one moment, gender depends on race—for some whites to occupy the position ‘women’, there is a material need for certain labor to be done by people of color—and race depends on gender—the processes of racial formation depend on gender’s organizing categories, and the strategies of race are identical to those used for gender for centuries prior.

The categories upon which white supremacy depends emerged at the moment of colonialism, that is, the interpretation of non-white (at this point, non-Western-European, because white as organizing category did not exist, but stays with us) bodies as basically and essentially different, uncivilized, primitive. But these categories were especially defended because and through the ‘white’ man’s perception that the ‘females’ of the ‘third world’ were *not women*. Because of their ‘proclivity’ towards the outdoors, their ‘long, sagging breasts’, ‘wild sexuality’, ‘indifference’ to pain in childbirth, and so on (S. Kitch, *The Specter of Sex*), along with the general perception that there was no sexual difference in these places, these somewhat arbitrary classifications could take hold as natural and eventually evolve into white supremacy as it exists now, with its multiple manifestations, i.e. colonialism, slavery, and orientalism, and variety of originally patriarchal strategies, e.g., linguistic and exploitative categories based on

marked bodies, biological determinism based on these features, certain forms of discipline and surveillance, violence, and so on.

At the same time, the creation of the ‘post-scarcity’ category ‘women’ depended upon the labor of non-whites. The invention of white supremacy in the U.S. was a blow to the the beginnings of solidarity between white and Black bond laborers. The creation of a White subjectivity depended on a biological determinism of the Black body, that they were and are uncivilized, dangerous, and so on—which depended on the category ‘women.’ The interesting rhetorical move here was the move away from recognition and incorporation that women traditionally had. The Black body was not positioned as the Other to whites—rather, they became the embodiment of social death. The forced labor was not the crux of slavery. It was the reduction to flesh.

So we can contrast this to the position of women, which in the 18th, 19th centuries began to occupy a position that has traces of a discursive entity. Lacan says there is no women—but what he really means, is that there is a women-shaped hole in discourse. The Black body does not have this. But once we begin talking about being a Black woman, things get ever more complicated...

We focus here on the Black body because of our familiarity with Black critical race theory, but the positionality of being a raced body can never be reduced to this. The positions of the brown bodies—Middle Eastern, Latina, Asian, South Asian, ambiguously ‘ethnic’—are invariably more complex and heterogeneous. We cannot speak to the some truth of the plight of people of color, never a monolithic category of experience that can be theorized into a containable unit, always what Spivak calls a catachresis, a failed shorthand that captures nothing of reality.

What we can say, is that neither patriarchy nor capitalism can be understood without a clear analysis of how white supremacy—in

the US, in Europe, and around the world as a mechanism of imperialism—functions in our present moment. One million not-white women are exported from countries squeezed by globalization every year and funneled into the domestic labor and sexual market. Entire country's GDPs rely upon the annual remittances sent home by these women. There is much to be looked at here regarding the definitions gender and patriarchy and how it gradients along racial and class lines.

4

Similarly, or because of this, every articulation of the group “women” is always a total failure, is always-already undermined. Both historically and linguistically, it excludes positions we could name subaltern to this positive term.

Each generation of attempts to destroy patriarchy in the US was reduced to a specific group represented by this word “women”: first the aristocratic women could go to school or work or ride a bicycle, then the bourgeois white women could get divorces and fuck whichever man they wanted, then post-graduate women could kiss other women at parties and wear short skirts. This is a political trajectory of recuperation, marked by a reaffirmation of privilege.

To collapse the entire history of US feminism here is not exactly accurate. While there has always been a trend toward the white bourgeois hijacking of “struggle”, it would be remiss to flatten all attempts to “struggle” into what has been laid out above: in fact, when we do, we erase the nuances and struggles within the struggles. There are reasons why “women” moved toward some kind of reclamation of this category (and it wasn't just white women who did it, and it wasn't just the bourgeois).

In fact, the attack on organized feminism, utilized an idea of white/bourgeois dominated struggle to undermine autonomous

feminist struggles worldwide. Whether in the US or Latin America or the Philippines, groups of feminists organizing without the influence of men—whether in the private or public sphere—have been labeled as divisive, Western, bourgeoisie, movement killers. Because we live under the ‘patriarchy-white supremicist-capitalism’ any attempt at organizing carries with it the social constraints produced by the structure. Simultaneously, however, this truth is exploited to flatten these struggles historically and to crush any current activity at its start.

Why is it that global Marxism—a system of theoretical analysis rooted in one European man’s methodology, produced over 150 years ago—remains impervious to such assignments? Within global people’s struggles a fluent and internalized Marxist analysis is both expected of and actualized within all sectors of the movement. When this same historical materialist methodology is applied to the gender relation—when there is an attempt to identify patriarchy as a structure; when we begin to locate the ways in which the structure practically materializes, the movement consistently employs the aforementioned critique.

So, while it is necessary to identify the ways in which feminism, just as many other revolutionary struggles, has been driven and anchored in white supremicist notions, it is also necessary to distinguish how this has been used to assault, disempower and revise feminist organizing globally, especially women of color in nationalist liberation struggles. This critique, which again is absolutely valid, carries with it the possibility to invisibilize and obstruct non-white feminisms, both in the US and around the world.

That said, an understanding of the historical interaction between capitalism and patriarchy is critical. If one of the aims is to point to the construct of woman as a tool of capital’s subsistence—to make clear that there is no essential or natural category

“woman”—then it is crucial to point to the historical incidences wherein this category was formed. Each incarnation of this category was historically produced *for* the era in question. *Woman* in eighteenth century newly-colonized Africa meant something completely different from *woman* in WWII era Britain.

Here we return to the crux of the failure of status quo politics like liberal feminism: the impetus towards a hegemonic universalization of a certain form of experience, specifically one built on exclusion and death. Any static grouping of women or whatever impoverishes the very aim of our politics, i.e., creating a space to speak. Any and every reduction of women to a least common denominator fails, glossing over every difference that ends up neither addressing nor corresponding to any single person. To speak on behalf of a group is to recreate this stupid relation of being spoken for, pushing us (or ‘them’) back into silence and social nonexistence. We do not need the false solidarity of mass shared experience.

5

Wittig said:

“Woman” is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates “women” (the product of a relation of exploitation). “Woman” is there to confuse us, to hide the reality “women.” In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of “woman” including its most seductive aspects.

We rephrase her words:

“Cis-woman,” or “tran-woman,” or “trans-man,” or “gender-queer” is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates “not-men” (the product of a relation of exploitation). These terms are there to confuse us, to hide the

reality “not-men.” In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of “cis-woman,” or “tran-woman,” or “trans-man,” or “genderqueer” including its most seductive aspects.

We refuse the notion of any positive feminist subject, rather, we position ourselves against *patriarchy*, and thus, men. Thus, let us utilize “men” to refer to the universally signified Subject, “not-men” to designate the others. We would rather speak a language that deploys as referent the group we position ourselves against (perhaps simultaneously foreclosing on the inclusion of certain bodies within this category, ‘men’).

We would never be so arrogant to propose that the speech act of ‘not-men’ means anything but an abrogation of position, a theoretical doxa which comforts us against the essentialism and claims to universality of Jacobinism, orthodox Marxism, even feminism—all these suggestions of a *unity* of political actors. Grammatically, it is nonsensical to speak of not-men as *doing* something—anything—or having any unity. Forgive us for this mild affirmation of queer theory; we call our transgression mild only because we recognize it not as a panacea to the political tendency towards an affirmation of universality and its always accompanying tendency of exclusion, but as a speech act of intention, a goal or aspiration.

And anyway, there is some unity, there are some historic and global similarities regarding the ways in which a patriarchal structure materializes itself. The point here, is not to select one of these materialities as *the* representative of anything. The point here is to acknowledge the ways in which an identification of similarities most often results in a whitewashing of history, presents and analyses in general.

More significantly, we are rigorous regarding the ways in which patriarchy, race and capitalism have fused together in the present moment. We analyze patriarchy's mechanisms from this position. Thus, there is no one unitary experience of womanhood, yet there are unitary trends regarding the ways in which patriarchy materializes.

6

"Do you know what's really essentialist? This shitty world." (A. & K., Bloomington, 2011)

As per this particular political project—one that includes an agreement to experiment with political spaces, dialogues, theoretical thinking/writing—we are not including cismen. We want to see what happens when we (not perfectly/not utopian/not final solution) trudge through the process of writing/hanging/thinking without these placeholders of force, i.e. cismen.

This is not a question of 'kicking it' or even of individual political interactions or projects with cismen. As individuals outside the demarcations of our collective experiment, we do many things with cismen, not-men are not impervious to the structure. We are not trying to shame each other for fucking men, or working with men—in spite of the fact that we have the option not to, we all do 'kick it' with cismen quite frequently. And it goes beyond just hanging out. Many of us put a substantial amount of intellectual energy into these interactions for a variety of reasons. Cismen are our friends, cismen are kicking around concepts that we find interesting in styles and forms that intrigue us. Cismen have power that is seductive. Cismen validate us intellectually, personally, socially, &c.

Our experiment is based on not working with he who has spent their entire life assigned and identified as a man. We wonder still of the relationships between self-identification, gender assign-

ment at birth, and the material consequences of years of being socialized one gender or another, especially with the lack of a trans symbolic in what has become the dominant discourse (obvi, by violence), in that we do not understand it completely (but we'd love to be referred to more texts)—regardless, we want to make very clear that we understand any experience of not-men as within the bounds of our experiment.

We are taught to understand the capitalist mode of production as a structural whole. Within this, individual bosses enact this structural exploitation upon groups of individual workers. Thus the boss becomes the fundamental personification of a capitalist structure. It is called revolution when workers self-organize to destroy both the physical and intangible representations of their exploitation.

A few practicalities: (1) no one would ever argue for cross-class organization in a struggle against capitalism, i.e., which prole wants to organize with their boss, that is, their enemy, (2) when antagonism occurs between workers and bosses, our political allegiance is always with the worker, (3) while worker movements are often a moment of resurrection for the dead relics of the left, we still delight in any eruption of antagonism in this relation.

Why then, do different theoretical, political and practical rules apply to the destruction of patriarchy? Why do 'radicals' not immediately support and advance organizing away from cismen? Why do we not immediately side with not-men when they are embattled with men? Why not glee at every moment of strike or insurrection against men at the hands of not-men?

If patriarchy is a foundational and decisive antagonism producing this world, it follows that this same understanding must be generalized. Only an understanding of misogyny as an astructural cultural practice allows for these positions to be dismissed

as irrelevant and inconsequential. That is to say, an analysis that bypasses the fact of a patriarchal structure only to acknowledge individual action.

On one hand, not organizing with cismen means that, in a very practical way, we spend significantly less time dealing with misogynist/patriarchal violence. The implication, then, is that we are safer from the material violence of patriarchy by the fact that we have moved outside of it—a dull rewriting of ‘safe/r space’ rhetoric. However, this suggests that (1) one can move away from patriarchy, (2) that one should move away from patriarchy so as to be more safe—which amounts to victim-blaming, and (3) that cismen are the primary perpetrators/perpetuators of patriarchy. Obviously these implications are all highly problematic. Patriarchy is not a cultural practice that specific people can not-do, or that an aggregate of many people not-doing can make stop. Further, the argument is predicated on the total neglect of relations of friendships, camaraderie, or political alignment and of relations of race and class.

But, one of the things about cismen that we have noticed is that they very rarely can get beyond a basic ally position because they typically stand to benefit much more by the violent enforcement of patriarchy. They very rarely exceed this commitment of not-doing violence and have a material interest in the theoretical subsumption of patriarchy to capital/white supremacy/the state. Because our primary interest right now—specifically due to our positions of race, class, &c.—is doing theory, working with cismen seems not to be useful or practical. Even those who claim to be antagonistic to patriarchy are typically only open to our antagonisms “within the limits of male tolerance” (A. Rich). The door is slammed when we question the *foundations* of their politics; if we want them to hear us, we have to first placate them (“you are really intelligent and your projects are so important, would you like a snack?”), acting out the same role of social re-

producer, caretaker. And the instruments of thought available to us are saturated with patriarchy's mark—there is no neutral word even.

Thus, if the aim is to expand, deepen, and sharpen our analysis in a way that both is catalyzed by and will adequately respond to and transcend past experiences with cismen—and it's fairly clear that this objective doesn't stand to be furthered by the presence of cismen in said conversations, it becomes clear that this is not a party line against cismen, as though there is some social truth and goodness to our being autonomous from them. And, if we don't engage in broader action with men via the same reasoning, it doesn't seem politically any different from engaging in broader action with anyone with some wit/dedication whose fundamental politics are inadequate.

Thus, this is not a program. We are not building an organization or party of not-men, rather we reconstitute and consolidate in light of already existing conflict that *we* have experienced, elaborating on this contradiction, i.e., that analysis is our material interest in this situation and that materially, cismen have indicated their disinterest and actual opposition to this.

But, there remains the question: why have we prioritized gender in this way? Why do we not organize autonomously from white people? Obviously, we align ourselves in solidarity with struggles against white supremacy. As individual people of color, we suspect our prioritization of a separatism based on gender has to do not with our understanding of patriarchy as a primary system, instead, it has to do with compulsory heterosexuality. We've found that the sexual relation of patriarchy generally positions us against each other in a competitive way so that we don't talk to one another. In our experience, people of color in white-dominated spaces usually do. Race and gender are not homologous systems; the particularity of patriarchy is that not-men

are not segregated from their oppressors—not the case for white supremacy. Although this is in no way a universal truth (particularly in the ‘political’ spaces that have shaped our analysis and positions), the reality outside a space impacts it just as much within it, even if it is different. That is, there is a tradition of people of color being together or getting together in material spaces. That space does not exist for not-men.

It would be negligent to disregard the limitations of autonomous feminist organizing—we are not interested in positing these compositions of autonomous notmen as liberated spaces devoid of the social constraints produced by, what we are most comfortable calling, ‘patriarchy-white-supremacy-capitalism.’ Every being, having been created by this said system, carries with them the constituents of such. For example, the same division between reproductive and productive spheres are reproduced within the process of our own autonomy. Some not-men end up taking on the role of theoreticians, leaders, liaisons with men and these roles are assigned a particular value and carry with them a particular power. Others are relied upon to carry on with the (less valued/invisible) reproductive labor—the logistical work, the caretaking, and so on. The power dynamic doesn’t disappear, but rather is replicated and perpetuated by not-men.

Consequently, autonomous feminist organizing can only be understood as an experiment in “seeing what happens” when not-men construct and convene—physically, intellectually, socially—autonomously in material spaces.

It is absolutely necessary to articulate the impossibility of escaping entirely the patriarchal structure. In other words, autonomous spaces are not alternative realities devoid of the ramifications of an exploitative configuration. If we do not acknowledge this, we risk the mistake of operating from an ideological position that proclaims the possibility that a reconfiguring of individual deci-

sions and interactions alone have a comprehensive affect on the overall dismantling of the structural. This mistake has a myriad of personal and political consequences. Historically, when autonomous feminist organizing has been declared as *the* answer to a patriarchal structure, the focus on individual interactions (whether with each other as notmen or with men themselves) become *the* political terrain. Rather, individual interactions (or the personal) are just one terrain upon which the effects of the structure are experienced. Of course, part of the autonomous experiment is to validate the personal aspect of such; is an to attempt to name the everyday affects of the structure and to help each other maneuver within its omnipresence, but it is also about beginning to work with each other on developing a comprehensive structural analysis that encompasses the personal within it, while at the same time moves toward something bigger.

We're interested in how to get away from accusations and demands addressed to men and expressed as blatantly as possible. We don't want a sort of success based on reproducing masculinity—focusing on their history, discourse, production—while still being exploited by patriarchy. Demanding rights (or respect, or whatever) is of this logic, 'a subordinate form of politics and a politics of subordination' (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective).

In the end, our convergences without cismen aim to, amongst other things, experiment with the production of theory that is not initiated from a defensive position. We are no longer interested in convincing cismale theoreticians of a feminist legitimacy; in participating in a process of revising these theories toward a more comprehensive product. Since these theories have so far been unwilling to rework their fundamental nuclei to include the gender relation, dialogue without sufficient time to produce feminist positions will always be a waste of time.

POSTSCRIPT

"[Even in feminist spaces,] you start with skirts, and end up with a desire to affirm yourself on the stage, in the image of men..." (F.C.)

We understand the conditions that create this subject-position. They have so much power. The power of language, of violence, of the phallus. We get together spontaneously and superficially at first, without any power at all. ... And to leave these male circuits is difficult and frightening. Even our closest comrades feel this resentment, this cattiness, this jealousy, towards other not-men. We never know quite how to do camaraderie at first. How to trust each other. How to believe we are strong or smart or reliable.

Obviously we all have contradictions, we are not infallible. We want to learn and try to force ourselves away from what comes so easy. At the same time, though, we are not trying to delineate some terrain of not-men where all are our comrades, some stupid position of 'one big party.'

Pan y roses (Bread and Roses)

MANIFESTO

We, at Bread and Roses believe that the fight against the oppression of women is also a struggle against capitalism. Capitalism is a system based on exploitation and oppression of millions of individuals across the globe, conquering for its markets not only their entire populations and its inhospitable wilderness, but also its women and children.

Capitalism has pushed millions of women into the labor market, destroying the myth that condemned them to remain only at home under unfounded prejudices, allowing women to participate in social production, but it has do it in its own way. Capitalism has pushed women into the factories and companies, but to exploit them twice, with wages lower than those of men, to thereby also lower the wages of all workers. And besides, it has overburdened them with a double-shift that begins at home, continues in the factory and goes back home, but never ending for women.

With the development of technology, capitalism has enabled the socialization of housework. However, this does not happen precisely because capitalist profit lies on unpaid domestic work, thus is exempt from paying workers for the tasks corresponding to its own reproduction as labor (food, clothing, etc.). Encouragement and support of the patriarchal culture as “natural” tasks for women, allows that the daily “theft” of the capitalists as invisible.

Never before, as in capitalism, were scientific conditions created which allow women to decide what to do over their own body. The development of contraceptives such as pills, intrauterine devices, tubal ligations and even the possibility of an aseptic abortion without complications are now an inescapable fact. However, if we women can not decide over our own body, or deciding not to have children or when and how many, is because the Church, in complicity with the capitalist state, continues to impose on our lives. In addition to the million-dollar businesses which means underground, and that includes corruption, mafia, law enforcement and professionals, it is also true that the possibility of separating the pleasure from reproduction leads to a freedom that is dangerous to the interests of the ruling class, because women would not be seen merely as “incubators” and could choose to be mothers or not, when to be and how.

We at Bread and Roses consider that women and men who produce all social wealth are expropriated by the capitalists. They are the ones who can end this system of exploitation and oppression. This requires breaking with the capitalists, their state, their political parties representing their interests, and with representatives of the working class that are living on employers or state patronage and who can only betray the workers and their struggles. That is to say, we call for political independence of the working class and encourage all the steps being taken in this regard.

In their struggle against exploitation, there would be better allies for the working class that those sectors of society whose goals and needs are not met by this system in decay; the peasants, the small traders ruined by the big capitalist classes who impoverished urban average, the student movement, the rebellious. The working class will find an ally in its confrontation with the capitalist system between those who seek emancipation from the yoke of oppression that weighs them by the color of their skin, their sexuality, ethnicity, etc. This alliance led by women and

men who produce all the wealth of society, shows that capitalism can be hurt to death and do not really trust in the “opposition” to the ruling party headed by “progressives” of the employers or their politicians.

We at Bread and Roses believe that only through the social revolution this system of exploitation will end, and that that can lay the groundwork for the emancipation of women. We believe that all the formal rights that women have, become worthless if it does not aim to transform the heart of this system, based on the most abject of hierarchies; that a handful of people live at the expense of naked exploitation of millions of human beings. Women’s rights have always been torn from the governments and political regimes through the struggle and the mobilization of women themselves and it is very difficult to keep them within the narrow framework of this system, where we usually see women get some rights while others rights are taken away, or get some rights for some women who can not actually made for all, especially women workers, women in the popular sectors, and the poorest women.

But despite this, we who integrate Bread and Roses do not consider that there are stages “required” in the struggle for our emancipation. We believe that in developing the fight for a system with no exploitation or oppression is our fundamental duty is to promote women’s struggles for the best possible living conditions even in the same system, for the most basic democratic rights, including in partnership with all those who struggle, even when they don’t considered “like us”, that another set of true equality and freedom is possible.

So even though we consider ourselves part of the working class and its struggle for an end to all exploitation and oppression, Bread and Roses urges the broadest possible unity in action with all sectors in the struggle and mobilization for our demands. If

we can keep that unity, with independence from the state, the church, the regime and the bosses' parties, in this large unity fighting for our demands, we also include the men, mainly those who are exploited and oppressed because of their class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

We invite you to build Bread and Roses, a group of women workers, employed and unemployed, students, professionals, etc., fighting for the emancipation of women under these principles and from this perspective.

We are not asking—we demand! Our right to the bread, but also to the roses...

Patriarchal oppression has existed since ancient times, however, under no other system like capitalism is that patriarchy has given the best conditions, not only exist, but for strengthen to oppress millions of women worldwide. The oppression of women took other forms, but they have become functional to the capitalist system.

The growing feminization of the workforce, especially in the most precarious jobs, less qualified and less pay, along with maintaining strong inequality, heighten the conditions of oppression of women in our country and in the rest the world. In large factories, working conditions for women are the same hell. Our colleague Caty, who is a factory worker in a multinational food industry, told us about these companies: "In recent years, they have maintained their gains and even increased them, but this hasn't improved our situation, on the contrary, there is increasing of labor flexibility and precariousness. Although in food industry workers are mostly women, none of the companies recognized the need for childcare, laundry, or anything that helps us overcome our situation. The working conditions we suffer worsen every day our health. Rhythms, repetitive work cause us muscu-

loskeletal diseases, varicose veins, stress, tension and some cases can lead to serious accidents”.

According to a recent study by INDEC, the Argentine women’s salary is 15% less than that of men. According to the US Census Bureau women make 76.5 cents to every dollar a man makes. In the production sectors where the presence of women is the majority, the downward trend of wages is a categorical fact. In addition, women are always assigned to the tasks of less qualified and, therefore, lower wages. We could prove it when Bread and Roses support the struggle of workers in the subway. A worker told us: “Years ago we fought for our inclusion in the traffic section. The company did not allow us access to other sectors, which meant being relegated to the box office, with no possibility of a better wage”.

The “traditionally female tasks” such as teaching, nursing, etc. are poorly paid in addition to playing the stereotypes of women, that show always ready to care for others on the basis of personal sacrifice and devotion, seeking such jobs as if it were a “ministry” or a continuation of mothering role. An argument used against workers and health educators when they go to fight for their claims.

At the same time, it is women who dominate the informal economy, maintaining 30% of households in Argentina are under these conditions.

Unfortunately, the only equality reached on wages in our country has been the result of the scourge of unemployment, which has thrown 44 million Americans below the poverty line (1 in 7) according to the Washington Post.

Equal pay for equal work!

Equal opportunities for training and employment.

Distribution of working hours among employed and unemployed, with the same salary.

Genuine work for all.

Increased subsidies for unemployed partners.

Intertwined with these operating conditions, women are victims of sexual and moral harassment in the workplace. We are humiliated; and do not have the same rights to access to a job or a promotion simply for being women. Discrimination begins at the time of getting a job, men only need to show their skills and experience, while when we show our body, we must demonstrate that we do not want children or hide its existence if present, when they submit us to the most humiliating abuse. But while our children are a “nuisance” for employers that do not guarantee child care in business and industrial establishments, denying paying social charges or dismissing pregnant women, the fact is that through the family, the state, the church and the education system tell us that we are not real women if we are not mothers. The social mandate is that we will be fully realized only as women through motherhood.

However, women have no right to decide when and how to be mothers. **Abortion is a right not yet enjoyed in our country.** The prohibition of abortion, however, does not avoid it from taken place, almost 5,000 per year in Argentina, in conditions of secrecy, causing the deaths of more than 400 women, the poorest. Those lucky enough to survive this tragic situation generally suffer irreparable health consequences. And although we can not have the right to free abortion, carried out under hygienic conditions and appropriate medical personnel, access to contraceptives also remains difficult.

In our country we have recently witnessed the horrific cases of girls and adolescent pregnancy resulting from rape and abuse, judges who have been denied the right to terminate the preg-

nancy, thereby disrupting their children and forcing them to endure more violence. Meanwhile, Kirchner's government keeps a demagogic speech to women, the Vatican has confirmed its decision that no progress is made in the legislation on abortion rights in Argentina. In total continuity of the Menem administration, which established the "Day of the Unborn Child" and the government of De La Rúa, Kirchner government will still kneeling before the pope, while an increasingly resonant cases of priests who abuse of children.

We give birth, we decide!

Free childcare provided by employers and the State in factories and industrial establishments, 24 hours a day.

Full rights for pregnant women.

Non-abortion contraception and the right to free access to a hygienic abortion to avoid death.

We demand our right to information and sexual education in schools and establishments.

To the of lack of information, sex education and the economic difficulties that we must add, we live in a society in which, for many women, choosing a contraceptive method immediately places it as "suspicious" of infidelity against her husband. How often we hear stories of violence against women, who prefer to be pregnant for nine months of pregnancy is the only one not hit! Rape and abuse of women and girls are a very common, if not more common is because many of these cases are not even reported out of fear or shame.

That is what happened in Jujuy to the young Romina Tejerina, in a fit of madness, the result of a rape of which he was victim, attacked the newly born baby because it "saw" the face of the rapist. She was taken, while the rapist, who is the brother of a policeman, is free.

The figures of violence against women are huge, especially against girls and young women. The young are the most oppressed and exploited. As youth in general, a large portion of us do not have access to education and work, let alone the right to leisure time. Not only are the target of trigger-friendly police, but we are also victims of rape and sexual abuse.

Due to miserable conditions of living, the attention falls on us, taking care of younger siblings and the house when our parents work, having to “drop out from school” many of us, to take charge of the household.

Thanks to the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church instilled in our country, there is no sex education in public schools. This transforms abortion in the highest rate between teen girls in our country and also explains the very high rates of teenage pregnancy. The likelihood that rates will not survive in pregnancy complications is four times higher for young compared with adult women. At that violence must be added that the murder is one of the leading causes of death for women. In most of these crimes, the perpetrators are male relatives of the victim. Also recently witnessed the tragic story of Claudia Sosa, who for years endured rape, beatings and torture of her husband and who was never accepted their complaints because the police concealed the accused who was a member of their ranks.

Patriarchal domination violence also teaches that women should be submissive and obedient and men must be strong and powerful. And this “education”, repeated through the customs, the church, advertising and other authoritative voices, only takes its toll.

While the state has a monopoly of violence with its military and police, it maintains and reproduces the existing order. While some groups want the government to be “tough on crime”, the

truth is that police, prosecutors and politicians are always involved in the most egregious cases of rape followed by death teenagers and young women, as we have seen with Maria Soledad Catamarca, or in Santiago del Estero with Leyla and Patricia, in Mar del Plata with the dozens of murdered women whose cases have not been clarified completely, precisely because the interests of those who should investigate mafia.

Stop violence against women!

For commissions of inquiry, composed of relative victims, human rights organizations, etc. that are independent of the police force, justice and the state.

Let's put up a Bread and Roses organization around the country!

Women since ancient times we have offered resistance to patriarchal domination. Rural women for centuries rebelled against shortages and high prices of bread and flour. The women of the bourgeoisie and middle classes denounced during the French Revolution, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the city did not provide their own rights as women. Before World War I, thousands of women were traveling in England, France, USA and other countries claiming for their right to vote and be voted in public elections.

Current trends of feminism were developed in what has been called the *second wave*, which reached to be a mass movement in the core countries in the 1970's and included in its development different political and theoretical forms. The first period of this second wave corresponds mainly to the discussions between feminists of equality and different feminists around the concept of *gender*.

For *feminists of equality*, the conceptualization of *gender* as a social, not determined by anatomy, meant the rejection of biological determinism, commonly used to justify discrimination

against women. For *feminists of equality* fighting has to be aimed to eliminate socially constructed gender differences, because these differences reinforce the exclusion and oppression of women.

By the mid 1970's, it came in response to *feminism of equality*, the prospect of *difference feminism*, which tried to prove that the symbolization of sexual difference was made under a hierarchical view that privileges the masculine in detriment of the feminine. From this perspective, every struggle for equality will be listed in an assimilationist order to an andocentric values that concerns only males. Therefore, the *difference feminists* called for a new and positive understanding of femininity to be appreciated. The political fallout that resulted from this was the exaltation of difference. Stressing motherhood as the essence of women "and therefore associated alleged positive qualities such as non-violence, highlighting the woman's relationship with nature as opposed to the world of male culture and coming to support the need for a woman's world uncontaminated by the masculine", including separatism as sexual-political option, the *difference feminists* argued that women's liberation depends on the creation and development of a female counterculture. The most important was the return to essentialism biologist, as feminists fought for equality at the dawn of the second wave. Systems of domination, then, posed a dilemma for the oppressed: the integration into the system through the acceptance of their demands for "equality" or marginalized subcultures on ghettos that highlight the "difference." While *equality feminism* mostly finished being integrated into state structures and the regime, the *feminism of difference* was powerless to carry out a radical change of the system in which we live.

The fragmentation of the movement and integration of many feminists to multinational credit institutions, Government ministries, etc., converted them into gender technocrats, brings to

the table the question of what steps we need in order to move those who want to fight against oppression.

The vast majority of feminists question the very idea of organization and lack of “structures and leadership” has become one of the cornerstones of all groups and collective arise in order to fight for the emancipation of women. While it is true that this may be the natural reaction against a society that imposes hierarchies, structures and controls, the reality is that if we organize to fight for a common goal, at some point the lack of organization becomes a drag forward. As feminist Jo Freeman notes “to the extent that the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few, and the awareness that there is a relationship of power is limited to those who know norms”.*

The oppression of women is carried through the family, the church, education, and the state. - How to confront their oppression without being organized? Too many feminists point out that our goal should be limited to fighting for the rights of women, for women and only for women. Many times, this argument is used to not participate in the struggles of other sectors that fight for their demands or, worse, prevents the increased participation of women, mainly women workers and the grassroots, in the same struggle that carry forward.

But what sense would a group of colleagues, just a few hundred of us grouped by our shared ideas, if not aim to add to the fight against the oppression of other women workers, unemployed, students and activists, to build a large emancipatory movement, combative, vital, and active?

* Jo Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*

We strive for the best living conditions possible in this system, even when we know that it ensures our oppression. We do not lose sight of the vision of a world without exploitation and oppression of any kind. We fight because all differences are respected, but we know this is nothing but a sham, if we don't question the hierarchical system in which there are differences. And that systemic hierarchy is essentially, a handful of human beings who lives off the exploitation of millions.

So we say:

Long live the struggle of women for our emancipation, to fight on equal terms with all the oppressed and exploited in the way of social revolution!

Long live the social revolution to lay the groundwork for a final release of women and of all mankind, from the chains that oppress us today!

Translation by Dario Martini of Partido Trabajadores Socialistas (Socialist Workers Party).

Pan y roses (Bread and Roses)

SALUTES

Dear Comrades:

We are very happy to be able to send you a salute for your meeting in the activist women camp. In Mexico we are living an economic crisis that is unload over millions of workers and their families; and this is why, thousands of women suffer the prevarication and the lack of fundamental rights. Also we are living a reactionary alliance between the church and the right wing parties that have voted laws that penalize the right to abortion in 18 states of the country with up to 35 years of prison. At the same time they started homophobic and clerical campaigns against the sexual freedom, and against the acquisition of all legal rights to all couples of the same sex. The worse is the extension of the feminicides in the entire country; which has claimed hundreds of little girls and women as victims, and whose cases remain unpunished. In this reality we fight today in unity as part of the national democratic movement that was formed against the militarization, and from where we continue the fight to build a great women movement in defense of our rights. Also we know that it would be only through our own independent organization, and in conjunction with other sectors that the strength to win our rights would come out. This is why; we are full of enthusiasm for your meeting, since we think that you are our sisters in the other side of the border in our struggle against the oppression and exploitation towards women, students, workers, indigenous and migrants. We consider that the fight against the oppression

of women is also an anti-capitalist struggle; and that is why, only a social revolution lead by millions of female and male workers in alliance with poor people and all the other oppress sectors by this system, the one that will end up with all the capital chains, and will build the bases for the emancipation of women.

A combative salute,
Bread and Roses Association Mexico

Revolutionary greetings sisters in the struggle!

Feminists of the United States: We are Bread and Roses of Argentina. We appreciate that you are discussing our organization at your camp and would like to explain the history of our group.

The association of Bread and Roses of Argentina was born during the hike of the process of organization and struggles that were developed in our country from December 19 & 20 of 2001.

We were inspired and touched with the heroic struggled of the female workers of Brukman that took over their factory, we shouted with them “Here they Are, they are, female workers without a boss.” We were on a war footing to try to recover the factory from its last eviction.

It was around the solidarity with the female workers of Brukman and their important struggle to win back the factory and the workers control of it, that women of different organizations and independent feminist started to participate in women committees in the conferences of occupy factories that were organize by these female workers in conjunction with the workers of Zanon.

We met once again in the streets while mobilizing against the imperialist war in Iraq, and denouncing the consequences of the war towards the Iraq people and in specific to the Iraq women.

We also participated together in the Assembly for the Right to Abortion of Buenos Aires, and in the year of 2003 we confronted the church and the reactionary sectors during the XVIII National Encounter of Women in Rosario. At that time, we were a small group of no more than 40 women of Buenos Aires, La Plata, Neuquen, Rosario, and Gran Buenos Aires we were students, workers employ and unemployed, artists, and professionals the ones that travel with the idea of fighting for the right to abortion and the rights of women workers. In this action we had a big violet flag with the slogan *FOR THE RIGHT TO OPEN AND FREE ABORTION*. Today many of the current members of Bread and Roses met at this struggle.

Once we were back in our cities, and after this experience, we decided to develop a national militant organization of women workers employ and unemployed, students, and youth with the name Bread and Roses, in honor to the textile workers in the United States of the beginning of the past century that fought for their rights. The challenge that we took in our hands was the development of a great organization that will fight for the emancipation of women of all types of oppression from the perspectives of anti-capitalism, class conscious, and revolutionary. Even though, the oppression of women is not an invention of capitalism, this system uses and perpetuates the oppression against women. This is why; women historically have encountered in the workers and popular struggles a fertile field to fight for our rights.

For the last few years, our organization has participated in all the National Conferences of Women in Argentina, we mobilized in every International Women's Day, every day in the struggle for The Right to Abortion, and we have been part of the working class struggle, specifically following working class women who decide to come out and fight arm to arm with their male comrades at the same time that they demand their rights.

We have also started to organize with female comrades of other countries in Latin America such as; Chile, Brazil, and Mexico, we are part of the fight against the femicides in Mexico, in the fight of the workers with precarious contracts in the University of San Pablo in Brazil, and the struggle of the women workers and students in Chile. In all of these countries we fight in our daily basis against the big influence of the Catholic Church that continues deciding over the life of thousands of women, causing thousands of deaths every year for clandestine abortions; we also confront the reactionary sectors that opposed our rights and the rights of our comrades of the LGTB movement, with whom we have fight together for sexual freedom and we demand equal rights with respect to the diversity of our identities.

In Bread and Roses we organized women, workers, students, youth, employ and unemployed, and housewife. We do it with the conviction of whatever right we won will be a product of the independent mobilization of women from the state, the church, and employer's parties.

From Bread and Roses we raised the necessity of channeling all of our energies in developing an organization of thousands of women to fight for our rights, but also to build a militant workers movement of class consciousness with our male comrades. We are convinced that it would be our female and male workers the best allies in the fight for a society free of all types of chains of exploitation and oppression.

Saludos,
Bread and Roses Argentina

Translations by Eduardo Carreon from Struggles United (Luchas Unidas).

REQUIRED READING

Dearest comrades,

Two of the workshops at camp will be regarding (1) white supremacy, and (2) the gender binary. Everyone at the camp must attend these workshops. There will be no other workshops taking place at these times, and everyone's presence is mandatory. This will also be a time for folks of color, trans, intersex, or other 'gender-variant' (a problematic term) folks to caucus if they so desire.

Autonomous organizing by white middle class women has historically been the most hegemonic manifestation of autonomous feminist politics. It is crucial that we learn from the errors of previous autonomous feminist endeavours that asserted a unitary experience of patriarchy based on an hetero-normative, western and white middle class definition of womanhood. Frequently, in the schema of recuperation, these politics have been imbued with racist and transphobic theories and practices—often imposed on histories, from the outside.

It is obviously in the best interest of patriarchy-white-supremacy-capitalism to recuperate movements against it, often by expanding certain social relations so as to dull certain motions of resistance. In this case, we refer to moments of struggle against patriarchy that assimilated certain white middle class women while dulling the blade of radical feminism that was interested in not

only fighting cultural misogyny, but also white supremacy, the gender binary, and, of course, capitalism. The veil, then, of the American dream, of justice and equality, is kept up by introducing certain bodies into the fold of patriarchy-white-supremacy-capitalism while simultaneously re-excluding others. The faulty notion that inclusion of these bodies will eventually lead to the inclusions of others has historically proven to be false, creating dichotomies of ‘good women, bad women,’ ‘good queers, bad queers,’ ‘good p.o.c., bad p.o.c.,’ and so on—always working against our fight, that is, against everything.

We mention this only to situate ourselves historically, to point toward the danger of replicating these problematics. In an effort to acknowledge that autonomous spaces are not, in fact, alternative zones impervious to the structural realities produced by ‘patriarchy-white supremacy-capital,’ it is necessary to confront and to generate a rigorous and critical dialogue that include the multitude of elements that create and inform this world.

We encourage everyone to complete these readings prior to the camp, so that there is time to mull over and internalize the ideas and so that the conversations in the mandatory workshops can be as engaging and useful as possible. The texts are attached to this email in PDF form. We can also fedex overnight you printed copies if access to printing is a concern.

The readings will be as follows:

Binary Workshop:

(1) The Transfeminist Manifesto, by Emi Koyama; (2) Hermaphrodites with Attitude Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism, by Cheryl Chase; and,

Race Workshop:

(1) Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing, by Andrea Smith; (2) From Serivitude to Service Work, by Evelyn Nakano Glenn.

Yours,
Ruthless

Emi Koyama

THE TRANSFEMINIST MANIFESTO

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented broadening of the American feminist movement as a result of the participation of diverse groups of women. When a group of women who had previously been marginalized within the mainstream of the feminist movement broke their silence, demanding their rightful place within it, they were first accused of fragmenting feminism with trivial matters, and then were eventually accepted and welcomed as a valuable part of feminist thought. We have become increasingly aware that diversity is our strength, not our weakness. No temporary fragmentation or polarization is too severe to nullify the ultimate virtues of inclusive coalition politics.

Every time a group of women previously silenced begins to speak out, other feminists are challenged to rethink their idea of who they represent and what they stand for. Although this process sometimes leads to a painful realization of our own biases and internalized oppressions as feminists, it eventually benefits the movement by widening our perspectives and constituencies. It is with this understanding that we declare that the time has come for trans women to openly take part in feminist revolution, further expanding the scope of the movement.

“Trans” is often used as an inclusive term encompassing a wide range of gender norm violations that involve some discontinuity between the sex a person is assigned at birth and her or his gender identity and expression. For the purpose of this manifesto, however, the phrase “trans women” is used to refer to those individuals who identify, present, or live more or less as women despite their sex assignment at birth. “Trans men,” likewise, is used to describe those who identify, present, or live as men despite the fact that they were perceived otherwise at birth. While this operational definition leaves out many trans people who do not conform to the male/female dichotomy or those who are transgendered in other ways, it is our hope that they will recognize enough similarities between issues that we all face and find our analysis somewhat useful in their own struggles as well.

Transfeminism is primarily a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond. It is also open to other queers, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women, non-trans men, and others who are sympathetic to the needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation. Historically, trans men have made a greater contribution to feminism than have trans women. We believe that it is imperative that more trans women start participating in the feminist movement alongside others for our liberation.

Transfeminism is not about taking over existing feminist institutions. Instead, it extends and advances feminism as a whole through our own liberation and coalition work with all others. It stands up for trans and non-trans women alike and asks non-trans women to stand up for trans women in return. Transfeminism embodies feminist coalition politics in which women from different backgrounds stand up for each other, because if we do not stand for each other, nobody will.

PRIMARY PRINCIPLES

The primary principles of transfeminism are simple. First, it is our belief that each individual has the right to define her or his own identity and to expect society to respect it. This also includes the right to express our gender without fear of discrimination or violence. Second, we hold that we have the sole right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, and that no political, medical, or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what we do with them.

However, no one is completely free from the existing social and cultural dynamics of the institutionalized gender system. When we make any decisions regarding our gender identity or expression, we cannot escape the fact that we do so in the context of the patriarchal binary gender system. Trans women in particular are encouraged and sometimes required to adopt the traditional definition of femininity in order to be accepted and legitimized by the medical community, which has appointed itself as the arbiter of who is genuinely “woman” and who is not. Trans women often find themselves having to “prove” their womanhood by exhibiting gender stereotypes in order to receive hormonal and surgical interventions and to be acknowledged as women. This practice is oppressive to trans and non-trans women alike, as it denies the uniqueness of each woman.

Transfeminism holds that nobody shall be coerced into or out of personal decisions regarding her or his gender identity or expression in order to be a “real” woman or a “real” man. We also believe that nobody should be coerced into or out of these personal decisions in order to qualify as a “real” feminist.

As trans women, we have learned that our safety is often dependent on how well we can “pass” as “normal” women; as transfeminists, we find ourselves constantly having to negotiate our need

for safety and comfort against our feminist principles. Transfeminism challenges women, including trans women, to examine how we all internalize heterosexist and patriarchal gender mandates and what global implications our actions entail; at the same time, we make it clear that it is not the responsibility of a feminist to rid herself of every resemblance to the patriarchal definition of femininity. Women should not be accused of reinforcing gender stereotypes for making personal decisions, even if these decisions appear to comply with certain gender roles. Such a purity test is disempowering to women because it denies our agency, and it will only alienate a majority of women, trans or not, from taking part in the feminist movement.

Transfeminism believes in the notion that there are as many ways of being a woman as there are women and that we should be free to make our own decisions without guilt. To this end, transfeminism confronts social and political institutions that inhibit or narrow our individual choices, while refusing to blame individual women for making personal decisions. It is unnecessary—and, in fact, *oppressive*—to require women to abandon their freedom to make personal choices in order to be considered true feminists, for this view will only replace the rigid patriarchal construct of ideal femininity with a slightly modified feminist version that is just as rigid. Transfeminism believes in fostering an environment in which women's individual choices are honored, and in scrutinizing and challenging institutions that limit the range of choices available to them.

THE QUESTION OF MALE PRIVILEGE

Some feminists, particularly radical lesbian feminists, have accused trans women and men of benefiting from male privilege. Male-to-female transsexuals, they argue, are socialized as boys and are thus given male privilege; female-to-male transsexuals, on the other hand, are characterized as traitors who have aban-

doned their sisters in a pathetic attempt to acquire male privilege. Transfeminism must respond to this criticism because it has been used to justify discrimination against trans women and men within some feminist circles.

When confronted with such an argument, a natural initial response of trans women is to deny ever having had any male privilege whatsoever in their lives. It is easy to see how they would come to believe that being born male was more of a burden than a privilege: many of them despised having male bodies and being treated as boys as they grew up. They recall how uncomfortable it felt to be pressured to act tough and manly. Many trans women have experienced bullying and ridicule by other boys because they did not act appropriately as boys. They were made to feel ashamed and frequently suffered from depression. Even as adults, they live with a constant fear of exposure, which would jeopardize their employment, family relationships, friendships, and safety.

However, as transfeminists, we must resist such a simplistic reaction. While it is true that male privilege affects some men far more than others, it is hard to imagine that trans women born as males never benefited from it. Most trans women have “passed” as men (albeit as “sissy” ones) at some point in their lives, and were thus given preferential treatment in education and employment, for example, whether or not they enjoyed being perceived as men. They have been trained to be assertive and confident, and some trans women manage to maintain these “masculine” traits, often to their advantage, after transitioning.

What happens is that we often confuse the oppression we have experienced for being gender-deviant with the absence of male privilege. Instead of claiming that we have never benefited from male supremacy, we need to assert that our experiences represent

a dynamic interaction between male privilege and the disadvantage of being trans.

Any person who has a gender identity or an inclination toward a gender expression that matches the sex attributed to her or him has a privilege of being non-trans. This privilege, like other privileges, is invisible to those who possess it. And as is true of all other privileges, those who lack the privilege intuitively know how severely they suffer because of its absence. A trans woman may have limited access to male privilege depending on how early she transitioned and how fully she lives as a woman, but at the same time she experiences vast emotional, social, and financial disadvantages for being trans. The suggestion that trans women are inherently more privileged than other women is as ignorant as the claim that gay male couples are more privileged than heterosexual couples because both partners have male privilege.

Tensions often arise when trans women attempt to access “women’s spaces” that are supposedly designed to be safe havens from the patriarchy. The origin of these “women’s spaces” can be traced back to the early lesbian feminism of the 1970s, which consisted mostly of white, middle-class women who prioritized sexism as the most fundamental social inequality while largely disregarding their own role in perpetuating other oppressions such as racism and classism. Under the assumption that sexism marked women’s lives far more significantly than any other social elements, they assumed that their experience of sexism was universal to all women- meaning all non-trans women- regardless of ethnicity, class, and so on. Recent critiques of radical feminism from the 1970s point out how their convenient negligence of racism and classism in effect privileged themselves as white, middle-class women.

Having come to this understanding, transfeminists should not respond to the accusation of male privilege with denial. We

should have the courage to acknowledge ways in which trans women may have benefited from male privilege—some more than others, obviously just as those of us who are white should address the benefits of white privilege. Transfeminism believes in the importance of honoring our differences as well as our similarities, because women come from a variety of backgrounds. Transfeminists confront our own privileges and expect non-trans women to acknowledge the privilege of being nontrans as well.

By acknowledging and addressing our privileges, trans women can hope to build alliances with other groups of women who have traditionally been neglected and deemed “unladylike” by a white, middleclass standard of womanhood. When we are called deviant and attacked just for being ourselves, there is nothing to gain from avoiding the question of privilege.

DECONSTRUCTING THE REVERSE ESSENTIALISM

Though the second wave of feminism popularized the idea that a person’s gender is distinct from her or his physiological sex and is socially and culturally constructed, it largely left unquestioned the belief that there was such a thing as true physical (biological) sex. The separation of gender from sex was a powerful rhetorical move used to break down compulsory gender roles, but it allowed feminists to question only half of the problem, avoiding the question of the naturalness of essential female and male sexes.

Transfeminism holds that sex and gender are both socially constructed; furthermore, the distinction between sex and gender is artificially drawn as a matter of convenience. While the concept of gender as a social construct has proven to be a powerful tool in dismantling traditional attitudes toward women’s capabilities, it left room for one to justify certain discriminatory policies or structures as having a biological basis. It also failed to address the realities of experiences for trans people, for whom biological sex

is felt to be more artificial and changeable than their inner sense of who they are.

The social construction of biological sex is more than an abstract observation: it is a physical reality that many intersex people go through. Because society makes no provision for the existence of people whose anatomical characteristics do not neatly fit into male or female, they are routinely mutilated by medical professionals and manipulated into living as the sex they have been assigned, usually at birth. Intersex people are usually not given an opportunity to decide for themselves how they wish to live and whether they want surgical or hormonal “correction.” Many intersex people find it appalling that they had no say in such a major life decision, whether or not their gender identity happened to match their assigned sex. We believe that genital mutilation of intersex children is inherently abusive because it unnecessarily violates the integrity of their bodies without proper consent. The issue is not even whether the sex a person was assigned matches her or his gender identity; it is whether intersex people are given real choice over what happens to their bodies.

Trans people feel dissatisfied with the sex assigned to them without their consent according to Simplistic medical standards. Trans people are diverse: some identify with, and live as members of, the sex different from what was assigned to them by medical authorities, either with or without medical intervention, while others identify with neither sex or with both sexes. Trans liberation is about taking back the right to define ourselves from medical, religious, and political authorities. Transfeminism views any method of assigning sex as socially and politically constructed, and advocates a social arrangement in which one is free to assign her or his own sex (or non-sex, for that matter).

As trans people begin to organize politically, it is tempting to adopt the essentialist notion of gender identity. The cliché popu-

larized by the mass media is that trans people are “women trapped in men’s bodies” or vice versa. The attractiveness of such a strategy is clear, as the general population is more likely to become supportive of us if we can convince them that we are somehow born with a biological error over which we have no control. It is also often in tune with our own sense of who we are, which feels very deep and fundamental to us. However, as transfeminists, we resist such temptations because of their implications.

Trans people have often been described as those whose physical sex does not match the gender of their mind or soul. This explanation might make sense intuitively, but it is nonetheless problematic for transfeminism. To say that one has a female mind or soul would mean there are male and female minds that are different from each other in some identifiable way, which in turn may be used to justify discrimination against women. Claiming an essential gender identity can be just as dangerous as resorting to biological essentialism.

Transfeminism believes that we construct our own gender identities based on what feels genuine, comfortable, and sincere to us as we live and relate to others within given social and cultural constraints. This holds true for those whose gender identity is in congruence with their birth sex, as well as for trans people. Our demand for recognition and respect shall in no way be weakened by this acknowledgment. Instead of justifying our existence through reverse essentialism, transfeminism dismantles the assumption that sex and gender “naturally” cohere.

BODY IMAGE/CONSCIOUSNESS AS A FEMINIST ISSUE

We as feminists would like to claim that we feel comfortable, confident, and powerful with our own bodies. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many women, including trans women. For many transfeminists, the issue of body image is where our needs

for comfort and safety collide directly with our feminist politics. Many of us feel so uncomfortable and ashamed of our appearances that we opt to remain in the closet, or we endure electrolysis, hormone therapy, and surgical interventions to modify our bodies in congruence with our identity as women. These procedures are costly, painful, and time-consuming and can lead to the permanent loss of fertility and other serious complications, such as an increased risk of cancer.

Why would anyone opt for such a seemingly inhumane practice? Although we might like to believe that the need to match our bodies to our gender identity is innate or essential, we cannot, in honesty, neglect social and political factors contributing to our personal decisions.

One such factor is society's enforcement of dichotomous gender roles. Because our identities are constructed within the social environment into which we are born, one could argue that the discontinuity between one's gender identity and physical sex is problematic only because society is actively maintaining a dichotomous gender system. If one's gender were an insignificant factor in society, the need for trans people to modify their bodies to fit into the dichotomy of genders might very well decrease, although probably not completely.

However, such reasoning should not be used to hold back trans persons from making decisions regarding their bodies. Trans women are extremely vulnerable to violence, abuse, and discrimination, and should not be made to feel guilty for doing whatever it takes for them to feel safe and comfortable. Transfeminism challenges us to consider ways in which social and political factors influence our decisions, but ultimately demands that society respect whatever decisions each of us makes regarding her or his own body and gender expression.

It is not contradictory to fight against the institutional enforcement of rigid gender roles while simultaneously advocating for individuals' rights to choose how they live in order to feel safe and comfortable. Nor is it contradictory to provide peer support to each other so that we can build healthy self-esteem while embracing an individual's decision to modify his or her body if he or she chooses to do so. We can each challenge society's arbitrary assumptions about gender and sex without becoming dogmatic. None of us should be expected to reject every oppressive factor in our lives at the same time; it would burn us out and drive us crazy. The sum of our small rebellions combined will destabilize the normative gender system as we know it. Various forms of feminisms, queer activism, transfeminism, and other progressive movements all attack different portions of the common target, which is the heterosexist patriarchy.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Since the 1970s, feminists have identified violence against women not merely as a series of isolated events, but as a systematic function of the patriarchy to keep all women subjugated. Transfeminism calls attention to the fact that trans women, like other groups of women who suffer from multiple oppressions, are particularly vulnerable to violence compared to women with non-trans privilege.

First, trans women are targeted because we live as women. Being a woman in this misogynist society is dangerous, but there are some factors that make us much more vulnerable when we are the targets of sexual and domestic violence. For example, when a man attacks a trans woman, especially if he tries to rape her, he may discover that the victim has or used to have a "male" anatomy. This discovery often leads to a more violent assault, one fueled by homophobia and transphobia. Trans women are frequently assaulted by men when their trans status is revealed.

Murders of trans women, like those of prostitutes, are seldom taken seriously by the media and the authorities—especially if the victim is a trans woman engaged in prostitution.

Trans women are also more vulnerable to emotional and verbal abuse by their partners because of their often low self-esteem and negative body image. It is easy for an abuser to make a trans woman feel ugly, ashamed, worthless, and crazy, because these are the same messages the larger society has sent her over many years. Abusers get away with domestic violence by taking away women's ability to define their own identity and experiences—the areas where trans women are likely to be vulnerable to begin with. Trans women have additional difficulty in leaving their abusers because it is harder for them to find employment; they will almost certainly lose child custody to their abusive partner in a divorce if there are any children involved.

In addition, trans women are targeted for being queer. Homophobes tend not to distinguish between gays and trans people when they commit hate crimes, but trans people are much more vulnerable to attack because they are often more visible than gays. Homophobic terrorists do not look into people's bedrooms when they go out to hunt gays; they look for gendered cues that do not match the perceived sex of their prey, effectively targeting those who are visibly gender-deviant. For every gay man or lesbian whose murder makes national headlines, there are many more trans people who are killed across the nation, even though there are far more "out" gays and lesbians than there are "out" trans people.

Trans men also live in the constant fear of discovery as they navigate a society that persecutes men who step outside their socially established roles. Crimes against trans men are committed by strangers as well as by close "friends"; the crimes are undoubtedly motivated by a combination of transphobia and misogyny,

performed as a punishment for violating gender norms in order to put the offenders back in a “woman’s place.”

Because of the danger in which we live, transfeminism believes that violence against trans people is one of the largest issues we must work on. We may be hurt and disappointed that some women-only events refuse to let us in, but it is the violence against us that has literally killed us or forced us to commit suicide far too long. We have no choice but to act.

In this regard, cooperation with traditional domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and hate-crime prevention programs is essential. Some shelters have already decided to accept trans women just as they would any other women, while others hesitate for various reasons. We must organize and educate existing agencies about why trans women deserve to be helped by social service agencies if their domestic situation makes it necessary. We must stress that the dynamics of the violence against trans women is not unlike that involving non-trans women, except that we are often more vulnerable. And we should also advocate for services for trans men.

As transfeminists, we should not just demand that existing organizations provide services to us; we should join them. We should volunteer to assist them in developing effective screening methods in order to preserve safety as they expand their base. We should make ourselves available as crisis counselors and case managers to other trans women in need. We should help them fund trans-specific workshops for their staff, too. We should develop self-defense courses for trans women that are modeled after feminist self-defense programs for women, but which pay special attention to our unique experiences. There may not be enough of us to start our own shelters from scratch, but we can work toward the elimination of the violence against trans people as part of the

broader coalition working to eliminate violence against women and sexual minorities.

We must also address the issue of economic violence. Trans women are often in poverty because as women we earn less than men do, because overt discrimination against trans people in employment is rampant, and because of the prohibitively high cost of transitioning. This also means that abusive partners of trans women have more leverage to control us and keep us trapped in abusive relationships. Transfeminism believes in fighting transphobia and sexism simultaneously in the economic arena as well as in the social and political ones.

HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

It may seem ironic that trans women, who in general have no capacity for bearing children, would be interested in the women's reproductive rights movement, but trans feminism sees a deep connection between the liberation of trans women and women's right to choose.

First of all, society's stigmatization of trans existence is partly due to the fact that we mess with our reproductive organs. Nongenital cosmetic surgeries are performed far more frequently than sex reassignment surgeries, yet they do not require months of mandatory psychotherapy. Nor are people who pursue cosmetic surgeries ridiculed and scorned daily on nationally broadcast trash talk shows. Such hysteria over trans people's personal choices is fueled in part by society's taboo against the self-determination of our reproductive organs: like women seeking abortions, our bodies have become an open territory, a battleground.

Additionally, the hormones that many trans women take are similar in origin and chemical composition to what non-trans women take for birth control, emergency contraception, and hormone replacement therapy. As trans women, we share their

concerns over the safety, cost, and availability of these estrogen-related pills. Trans and non-trans women need to be united against the right-wing tactics aimed at making the means and information for controlling our bodies unavailable, if not illegal.

Of course, reproductive choice is not just about access to abortion or birth control; it is also about resisting the coerced sterilization or abortion of less privileged women. Likewise, transfeminism strives for the right to refuse surgical and hormonal interventions, including those prescribed for intersex people.

During the 1980s, lesbians were purged from some reproductive choice organizations because they were seen as irrelevant to that cause. But the right to choose is not exclusively a heterosexual issue or a non trans issue, as it is fundamentally about women having the right to determine what they do with their own bodies. Transfeminists should join reproductive choice organizations and demonstrate for choice. A society that does not respect women's right to make decisions regarding pregnancy is not likely to respect our right to make decisions about medical interventions to make our bodies congruent with our gender identity. If we fear having to obtain hormones from underground sources or traveling overseas for a sex reassignment surgery, we should be able to identify with women who fear going back to unsafe underground abortions.

In addition, transfeminism needs to learn from the women's health movement. Research on health issues that are of particular interest to women, such as breast cancer, did not arise in a vacuum. It was through vigorous activism and peer education that these issues came to be taken seriously. Realizing that the medical community has historically failed to address women's health concerns adequately, transfeminists cannot expect those in the position of power to take trans women's health seriously.

That is why we need to participate in, and expand, the women's health movement.

Drawing analogies from the women's health movement also solves the strategic dilemma over the pathologization of gender identity. For many years, trans people have been arguing with each other about whether to demand the de-pathologization of gender identity disorder, which is currently a prerequisite for certain medical treatments. It has been a divisive issue because the pathologization of gender identity disorder allows some of us to receive medical interventions, even though it stigmatizes us and negates our agency at the same time. Before the advent of feminist critiques of modern medicine, female bodies were considered "abnormal" by the androcentric standard of the medical establishment, which resulted in the pathologization of such ordinary female experiences as menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause; the women's health movement forced the medical community to accept that these events are part of ordinary human experiences. Transfeminism insists that transsexuality is not an illness or a disorder, but is as much a part of the wide spectrum of ordinary human experiences as pregnancy. It is thus not contradictory to demand that medical treatment for trans people be made more accessible, while de-pathologizing "gender identity disorder."

CALL FOR ACTION

While we have experienced more than our share of rejection within and outside feminist communities, those who have remained our best allies have also been feminists, lesbians, and other queers. Transfeminism asserts that it is futile to debate intellectually who is and is not included in the category "woman"; instead, we must act-now-and build alliances.

Every day, we are harassed, discriminated against, assaulted, and abused. No matter how well we learn to "pass," the social invis-

ibility of trans existence will not protect us when all women are under attack. We can never win by playing by society's rules of how women should behave; we need feminism as much as non-trans women do, if not more. Transfeminists take pride in the tradition of our feminist foremothers and continue their struggle in our own lives.

Transfeminism believes that a society that honors cross-gender identities is one that treats people of all genders fairly because our existence is seen as problematic only when there is a rigid gender hierarchy. It is essential for our survival and dignity that we claim our place in feminism, not in a threatening or invasive manner, but in friendly and cooperative ways. Initial suspicion and rejection from some existing feminist institutions are only natural, especially since they have been betrayed so many times by self-identified "pro-feminist" men; it is through our persistence and commitment to action that transfeminism will transform the scope of feminism into a more inclusive vision of the world.

POSTSCRIPT

I wrote "The Transfeminist Manifesto" in the summer of 2000, only a couple of months after I had moved to Portland, Oregon, where I found transgender and transsexual communities and began exploring the intersections of feminism and trans experiences. I guess I was naive, but initially I was surprised when I found out that there were anti-trans sentiments among some feminists and antifeminist sentiments among some trans people, because the trans people I had met were the kind of people I respected as both feminists and trans activists.

I wrote this manifesto in order to articulate a feminist theory that is decidedly pro-trans, and a trans rhetoric that is rooted in feminism. I think I succeeded.

There are, however, problems with this manifesto. In several revisions I made over the last two years, I fixed some of the minor problems, but larger problems are left intact, because they cannot be fixed without rewriting the entire piece. But I think it is important to discuss what these problems are and why they crept into this manifesto. Two of these larger problems are discussed below:

- Overemphasis on male-to-female trans people at the expense of female-to-male trans people and others who identify as transgender or genderqueer. I take full blame for the fact that this manifesto is heavily focused on the issues faced by male-to-female transsexual people, while neglecting the unique struggles of female-to-male trans people and other transgender and genderqueer people. At the time I wrote this piece, I felt the need to restrict the focus of feminism to “women” because I feared that expanding the focus would permit non-trans men to exploit feminism for their own interests, as some so-called men’s rights groups do. Although I still feel that this fear is justified, I now realize that privileging transsexual women’s issues at the expense of other transgender and genderqueer people was a mistake.

- Inadequate intersectional analysis. The manifesto focuses mainly on the intersection of sexism and the oppression against trans people, yet it fails to address how these issues intersect with other social injustices. For example, the manifesto refers to women of color’s critiques of white women’s racism within the feminist movement, but fails to address how trans women can become allies of women of color. Again, I hesitated to move the focus away from sexism at the time I wrote this manifesto, as I feared other (non-trans) feminists’ criticisms. Now I agree with the notion that any feminist theory that fails to account for racism, classism, ableism, etc., operating among women is incomplete. I concede that this manifesto is incomplete.

Although I am making two very different critiques, the manifesto's problems both come from the same source: the idea that feminists should focus primarily-sometimes solely-on the oppression that all women experience. In this worldview, issues such as racism and classism can be addressed only when they further the battle against the patriarchy-for example, by addressing white men's racism against women of color-but not when they expose the hidden divisions within the women's movement. This manifesto for the most part plays into this trajectory while failing to challenge its racist, classist, or other implications. I realize now that, at the time I wrote the manifesto, I did not feel secure enough in my own conviction in multi-issue organizing and gave in to the fear that I would be criticized for diluting feminism. Only through camaraderie with other fierce women of color, working class women, and women with disabilities have I become free from this fear.

I have thought about writing a new manifesto to address these and other insights I have gained since 2000, with the confidence and clarity I have now, but for now I am leaving the task to others. If you write one, please send it to me.

Cheryl Chase

HERMAPHRODITES WITH ATTITUDE

MAPPING THE EMERGENCE OF INTERSEX POLITICAL ACTIVISM

The insistence on two clearly distinguished sexes has calamitous personal consequences for the many individuals who arrive in the world with sexual anatomy that fails to be easily distinguished as male or female. Such individuals are labeled “intersexuals” or “hermaphrodites” by modern medical discourse.¹ About one in a hundred births exhibits some anomaly in sex differentiation,² and about one in two thousand is different enough to render problematic the question “Is it a boy or a girl?”³ Since the early 1960s, nearly every major city in the United States has had a hospital with a standing team of medical experts who intervene in these cases to assign —through drastic surgical means —a male or female status to intersex infants. The fact that this system for preserving the boundaries of the categories male and female has existed for so long without drawing criticism or scrutiny from any quarter indicates the extreme discomfort that sexual ambiguity excites in our culture. Pediatric genital surgeries literalize what might otherwise be considered a theoretical operation: the attempted production of normatively sexed bodies and gendered subjects through constitutive acts of violence. Over the last few

years, however, intersex people have begun to politicize intersex identities, thus transforming intensely personal experiences of violation into collective opposition to the medical regulation of bodies that queer the foundations of heteronormative identifications and desires.

HERMAPHRODITES: MEDICAL AUTHORITY AND CULTURAL INVISIBILITY

Many people familiar with the ideas that gender is a phenomenon not adequately described by male/female dimorphism and that the interpretation of physical sex differences is culturally constructed remain surprised to learn just how variable sexual anatomy is.⁴ Though the male/female binary is constructed as natural and presumed to be immutable, the phenomenon of intersexuality offers clear evidence to the contrary and furnishes an opportunity to deploy “nature” strategically to disrupt heteronormative systems of sex, gender, and sexuality. The concept of bodily sex, in popular usage, refers to multiple components including karyotype (organization of sex chromosomes), gonadal differentiation (e.g., ovarian or testicular), genital morphology, configuration of internal reproductive organs, and pubertal sex characteristics such as breasts and facial hair. Because these characteristics are expected to be concordant in each individual—either all male or all female—an observer, once having attributed male or female sex to a particular individual, assumes the values of other unobserved characteristics.⁵

Because medicine intervenes quickly in intersex births to change the infant’s body, the phenomenon of intersexuality is today largely unknown outside specialized medical practices. General public awareness of intersex bodies slowly vanished in modern Western European societies as medicine gradually appropriated to itself the authority to interpret—and eventually manage—the category which had previously been widely known as

“hermaphroditism.” Victorian medical taxonomy began to efface hermaphroditism as a legitimated status by establishing mixed gonadal histology as a necessary criterion for “true” hermaphroditism. By this criterion, both ovarian and testicular tissue types had to be present. Given the limitations of Victorian surgery and anesthesia, such confirmation was impossible in a living patient. All other anomalies were reclassified as “pseudohermaphroditisms” masking a “true sex” determined by the gonads.⁶

With advances in anesthesia, surgery, embryology, and endocrinology, however, twentieth-century medicine moved from merely labeling intersexed bodies to the far more invasive practice of “fixing” them to conform with a diagnosed true sex. The techniques and protocols for physically transforming intersexed bodies were developed primarily at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore during the 1920s and 1930s under the guidance of urologist Hugh Hampton Young. “Only during the last few years,” Young enthused in the preface to his pioneering textbook, *Genital Abnormalities*, “have we begun to get somewhere near the explanation of the marvels of anatomic abnormality that may be portrayed by these amazing individuals. But the surgery of the hermaphrodite has remained a terra incognita.” The “sad state of these unfortunates” prompted Young to devise “a great variety of surgical procedures” by which he attempted to normalize their bodily appearances to the greatest extents possible.⁷

Quite a few of Young’s patients resisted his efforts. One, a “snappy” young negro woman with a good figure” and a large clitoris, had married a man but found her passion only with women. She refused “to be made into a man” because removal of her vagina would mean the loss of her “meal ticket,” namely, her husband.⁸ By the 1950s, the principle of rapid postnatal detection and intervention for intersex infants had been developed at John Hopkins with the stated goal of completing surgery early enough so that the child would have no memory of it.⁹ One wonders wheth-

er the insistence on early intervention was not at least partly motivated by the resistance offered by adult intersexuals to normalization through surgery. Frightened parents of ambiguously sexed infants were much more open to suggestions of normalizing surgery, while the infants themselves could of course offer no resistance whatever. Most of the theoretical foundations justifying these interventions are attributable to psychologist John Money, a sex researcher invited to Johns Hopkins by Lawson Wilkins, the founder of pediatric endocrinology.¹⁰ Wilkins's numerous students subsequently carried these protocols to hospitals throughout the United States and abroad.¹¹ Suzanne Kessler notes that today Wilkins and Money's protocols enjoy a "consensus of approval rarely encountered in science."¹²

In keeping with the Johns Hopkins model, the birth of an intersex infant today is deemed a "psychosocial emergency" that propels a multidisciplinary team of intersex specialists into action. Significantly, they are surgeons and endocrinologists rather than psychologists, bioethicists, representatives from intersex peer support organizations, or parents of intersex children. The team examines the infant and chooses either male or female as a "sex of assignment," then informs the parents that this is the child's "true sex." Medical technology, including surgery and hormones, is then used to make the child's body conform as closely as possible to that sex.

The sort of deviation from sex norms exhibited by intersexuals is so highly stigmatized that the likely prospect of emotional harm due to social rejection of the intersexual provides physicians with their most compelling argument to justify medically unnecessary surgical interventions. Intersex status is considered to be so incompatible with emotional health that misrepresentation, concealment of facts, and outright lying (both to parents and later to the intersex person) are unabashedly advocated in professional medical literature.¹³ Rather, the systematic hushing

up of the fact of intersex births and the use of violent techniques to normalize intersex bodies have caused profound emotional and physical harm to intersexuals and their families. The harm begins when the birth is treated as a medical crisis, and the consequences of that initial treatment ripple out ever afterward. The impact of this treatment is so devastating that until just a few years ago, people whose lives have been touched by intersexuality maintained silence about their ordeal. As recently as 1993, no one publicly disputed surgeon Milton Edgerton when he wrote that in forty years of clitoral surgery on intersexuals, “not one has complained of loss of sensation, *even when the entire clitoris was removed*.”¹⁴

The tragic irony is that, while intersexual anatomy occasionally indicates an underlying medical problem such as adrenal malfunction, ambiguous genitals are in and of themselves neither painful nor harmful to health. Surgery is essentially a destructive process. It can remove and to a limited extent relocate tissue, but it cannot create new structures. This technical limitation, taken together with the framing of the feminine as a condition of lack, leads physicians to assign 90 percent of anatomically ambiguous infants as female by excising genital tissue. Members of the Johns Hopkins intersex team have justified female assignment by saying, “You can make a hole, but you can’t build a pole.”¹⁵ Positively heroic efforts shore up a tenuous masculine status for the remaining 10 percent assigned male, who are subjected to multiple operations—twenty-two in one case¹⁶—with the goal of straightening the penis and constructing a urethra to enable standing urinary posture. For some, the surgeries end only when the child grows old enough to resist.¹⁷

Children assigned to the female sex are subjected to surgery that removes the troubling hypertrophic clitoris (the same tissue that would have been a troubling micropenis if the child had been assigned male). Through the 1960s, feminizing pediatric genital

surgery was openly labeled “clitorectomy” and was compared favorably to the African practices that have been the recent focus of such intense scrutiny. As three Harvard surgeons noted, “Evidence that the clitoris is not essential for normal coitus may be gained from certain sociological data. For instance, it is the custom of a number of African tribes to excise the clitoris and other parts of the external genitals. Yet normal sexual function is observed in these females.”¹⁸ A modified operation that removes most of the clitoris and relocates a bit of the tip is variously (and euphemistically) called clitoroplasty, clitoral reduction, or clitoral recession and is described as a “simple cosmetic procedure” to differentiate it from the now infamous clitorectomy. However, the operation is far from benign. Here is a slightly simplified summary (in my own words) of the surgical technique—recommended by Johns Hopkins Surgeons Oesterling, Gearhart, and Jeffs—that is representative of the operation:

They make an incision around the phallus, at the corona, then dissect the skin away from its underside. Next they dissect the skin away from the dorsal side and remove as much of the corpora, or erectile bodies, as necessary to create an “appropriate size clitoris.” Next, stitches are placed from the pubic area along both sides of the entire length of what remains of the phallus; when these stitches are tightened, it folds up like pleats in a skirt, and recesses into a concealed position behind the mons pubis. If the result is still “too large,” the glans is further reduced by cutting away a pie-shaped wedge.¹⁹

For most intersexuals, this sort of arcane, dehumanized medical description, illustrated with close-ups of genital surgery and naked children with blacked-out eyes, is the only available version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. We as a culture have relinquished to medicine the authority to police the boundaries of male and female, leaving intersexuals to recover as best they can, alone and silent, from violent normalization.

MY CAREER AS A HERMAPHRODITE: RENEGOTIATING CULTURAL MEANINGS

I was born with ambiguous genitals. A doctor specializing in intersexuality deliberated for three days—sedating my mother each time she asked what was wrong with her baby—before concluding that I was male, with a micropenis, complete hypospadias, undescended testes, and a strange extra opening behind the urethra. A male birth certificate was completed for me, and my parents began raising me as a boy. When I was a year and a half old my parents consulted a different set of experts, who admitted me to a hospital for “sex determination.” “Determine” is a remarkably apt word in this context, meaning both “to ascertain by investigation” and “to cause to come to a resolution.” It perfectly describes the two-stage process whereby science produces through a series of masked operations what it claims merely to observe. Doctors told my parents that a thorough medical investigation would be necessary to determine (in the first sense of that word) what my “true sex” was. They judged my genital appendage to be inadequate as a penis, too short to mark masculine status effectively or to penetrate females. As a female, however, I would be penetrable and potentially fertile. My anatomy having been relabeled as vagina, urethra, labia, and outsized clitoris, my sex was determined (in the second sense) by amputating my genital appendage. Following doctors’ orders, my parents then changed my name, combed their house to eliminate all traces of my existence as a boy (photographs, birthday cards, etc.), changed my birth certificate, moved to a different town, instructed extended family members no longer to refer to me as a boy, and never told anyone else—including me—just what had happened. My intersexuality and change of sex were the family’s dirty little secrets.

At age eight, I was returned to the hospital for abdominal surgery that trimmed away the testicular portion of my gonads, each of which was partly ovarian and partly testicular in character. No

explanation was given to me then for the long hospital stay or the abdominal surgery, nor for the regular hospital visits afterward, in which doctors photographed my genitals and inserted fingers and instruments into my vagina and anus. These visits ceased as soon as I began to menstruate. At the time of the sex change, doctors had assured my parents that their once son/now daughter would grow into a woman who could have a normal sex life and babies. With the confirmation of menstruation, my parents apparently concluded that that prediction had been borne out and their ordeal was behind them. For me, the worst part of the nightmare was just beginning.

As an adolescent, I became aware that I had no clitoris or inner labia and was unable to orgasm. By the end of my teens, I began to do research in medical libraries, trying to discover what might have happened to me. When I finally determined to obtain my medical records, it took me three years to overcome the obstruction of the doctors whom I asked for help. When I did obtain them, a scant three pages, I first learned that I was a “true hermaphrodite” who had been my parents’ son for a year and a half and who bore a name unfamiliar to me. The records also documented my clitorrectomy. This was the middle 1970s, when I was in my early twenties. I had come to identify myself as lesbian, at a time when lesbianism and a biologically based gender essentialism were virtually synonymous: men were rapists who caused war and environmental destruction; women were good and would heal the earth; lesbians were a superior form of being uncontaminated by “men’s energy.” In such a world, how could I tell anyone that I had actually possessed the dreaded “phallus”? I was no longer a woman in my own eyes but rather a monstrous and mythical creature. Because my hermaphroditism and long-buried boyhood were the history behind the clitorrectomy, I could never speak openly about that or my consequent inability to orgasm. I was so traumatized by discovering the circumstances

that produced my embodiment that I could not speak of these matters with anyone.

Nearly fifteen years later, I suffered an emotional meltdown. In the eyes of the world, I was a highly successful businesswoman, a principal in an international high tech company. To myself, I was a freak, incapable of loving or being loved, filled with shame about my status as a hermaphrodite and about my sexual dysfunction. Unable to make peace with myself, I finally sought help from a psychotherapist, who reacted to each revelation about my history and predicament with some version of “no, it’s not” or “so what?” I would say, “I’m not really a woman,” and she would say, “Of course you are. You look female.” I would say, “My complete withdrawal from sexuality has destroyed every relationship I’ve ever entered.” She would say “Everybody has their ups and downs.” I tried another therapist and met with a similar response. Increasingly desperate, I confided my story to several friends, who shrank away in embarrassed silence. I was in emotional agony, feeling utterly alone, seeing no possible way out. I decided to kill myself.

Confronting suicide as a real possibility proved to be my personal epiphany. I fantasized killing myself quite messily and dramatically in the office of the surgeon who had cut off my clitoris, forcibly confronting him with the horror he had imposed on my life. But in acknowledging the desire to put my pain to some use, not to utterly waste my life, I turned a crucial corner, finding a way to direct my rage productively out into the world rather than destructively at myself. I had no conceptual framework for developing a more positive self-consciousness. I knew only that I felt mutilated, not fully human, but that I was determined to heal. I struggled for weeks in emotional chaos, unable to eat or sleep or work. I could not accept my image of a hermaphroditic body any more than I could accept the butchered one the surgeons left me with. Thoughts of myself as a Frankenstein’s monster patchwork

alternated with longings for escape by death, only to be followed by outrage, anger, and a determination to survive. I could not accept that it was just or right or good to treat any person as I had been treated—my sex changed, my genitals cut up, my experience silenced and rendered invisible. I bore a private hell within me, wretchedly alone in my condition without even my tormentors for company. Finally, I began to envision myself standing in a driving storm but with clear skies and a rainbow visible in the distance. I was still in agony, but I was beginning to see the painful process in which I was caught up in terms of revitalization and rebirth, a means of investing my life with a new sense of authenticity that possessed vast potentials for further transformation. Since then, I have seen this experience of movement through pain to personal empowerment described by other intersex and transsexual activists.²⁰

I slowly developed a newly politicized and critically aware form of self-understanding. I had been the kind of lesbian who at times had a girlfriend but who had never really participated in the life of a lesbian community. I felt almost completely isolated from gay politics, feminism, and queer and gender theory. I did possess the rudimentary knowledge that the gay rights movement had gathered momentum only when it could effectively deny that homosexuality was sick or inferior and assert to the contrary that “gay is good.” As impossible as it then seemed, I pledged similarly to affirm that “intersex is good,” that the body I was born with was not diseased, only different. I vowed to embrace the sense of being “not a woman” that I initially had been so terrified to discover.

I began searching for community and consequently moved to San Francisco in the fall of 1992, based entirely on my vague notion that people living in the “queer mecca” would have the most conceptually sophisticated, socially tolerant, and politically astute analysis of sexed and gendered embodiment. I found

what I was looking for in part because my arrival in the Bay Area corresponded with the rather sudden emergence of an energetic transgender political movement. Transgender Nation (TN) had developed out of Queer Nation, a post-gay/lesbian group that sought to transcend identity politics. TN's actions garnered media attention—especially when members were arrested during a “zap” of the American Psychiatric Association's annual convention when they protested the psychiatric labeling of transsexuality as mental illness. Transsexual performance artist Kate Bornstein was introducing transgender issues in an entertaining way to the San Francisco gay/lesbian community and beyond. Female-to-male issues had achieved a new level of visibility due in large part to efforts made by Lou Sullivan, a gay FTM activist who had died an untimely death from HIV-related illnesses in 1991. And in the wake of her underground best-selling novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, Leslie Feinberg's manifesto *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* was finding a substantial audience, linking transgender social justice to a broader progressive political agenda for the first time.²¹ At the same time, a vigorous new wave of gender scholarship had emerged in the academy.²² In this context, intersex activist and theoretician Morgan Holmes could analyze her own clitorrectomy for her master's thesis and have it taken seriously as academic work.²³ Openly transsexual scholars, including Susan Stryker and Sandy Stone, were visible in responsible academic positions at major universities. Stone's “*Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*” refigured open, visible transsexuals not as gender conformists propping up a system of rigid, binary sex but as “a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored.”²⁴

Into this heady atmosphere, I brought my own experience. Introduced by Bornstein to other gender activists, I explored with them the cultural politics of intersexuality, which to me represented yet another new configuration of bodies, identities, de-

sires, and sexualities from which to confront the violently normativizing aspects of the dominant sex/gender system. In the fall of 1993, TN pioneer Anne Ogborn invited me to participate in a weekend retreat called the New Woman Conference, where postoperative transsexual women shared their stories, their griefs and joys, and enjoyed the freedom to swim or sunbathe in the nude with others who had surgically changed genitals. I saw that participants returned home in a state of euphoria, and I determined to bring that same sort of healing experience to intersex people.

BIRTH OF AN INTERSEX MOVEMENT: OPPOSITION AND ALLIES

Upon moving to San Francisco, I started telling my story indiscriminately to everyone I met. Over the course of a year, simply by speaking openly within my own social circles, I learned of six other intersexuals—including two who had been fortunate enough to escape medical attention. I realized that intersexuality, rather than being extremely rare, must be relatively common. I decided to create a support network. In the summer of 1993, I produced some pamphlets, obtained a post office box, and began to publicize the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) through small notices in the media. Before long, I was receiving several letters per week from intersexuals throughout the United States and Canada and occasionally some from Europe. While the details varied, the letters gave a remarkably coherent picture of the emotional consequences of medical intervention. Morgan Holmes: “All the things my body might have grown to do, all the possibilities, went down the hall with my amputated clitoris to the pathology department. The rest of me went to the recovery room—I’m still recovering.” Angela Moreno: “I am horrified by what has been done to me and by the conspiracy of silence and lies. I am filled with grief and rage, but also relief finally to believe that maybe I am not the only one.” Thomas: “I pray that I will

have the means to repay, in some measure, the American Urological Association for all that it has done for my benefit. I am having some trouble, though, in connecting the timing mechanism to the fuse."

ISNA's most immediate goal has been to create a community of intersex people who could provide peer support to deal with shame, stigma, grief, and rage as well as with practical issues such as how to obtain old medical records or locate a sympathetic psychotherapist or endocrinologist. To that end, I cooperated with journalists whom I judged capable of reporting widely and responsibly on our efforts, listed ISNA with self-help and referral clearinghouses, and established a presence on the Internet (<http://www.isna.org>). ISNA now connects hundreds of intersexuals across North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. It has also begun sponsoring an annual intersex retreat, the first of which took place in 1996 and which moved participants every bit as profoundly as the New Woman Conference had moved me in 1993.

ISNA's longer-term and more fundamental goal, however, is to change the way intersex infants are treated. We advocate that surgery not be performed on ambiguous genitals unless there is a medical reason (such as blocked or painful urination), and that parents be given the conceptual tools and emotional support to accept their children's physical differences. While it is fascinating to think about the potential development of new genders or subject positions grounded in forms of embodiment that fall outside the familiar male/female dichotomy, we recognize that the two-sex/gender model is currently hegemonic and therefore advocate that children be raised either as boys or girls, according to which designation seems most likely to offer the child the greatest future sense of comfort. Advocating gender assignment without resorting to normalizing surgery is a radical position given that it requires the willful disruption of the assumed concordance be-

tween body shape and gender category. However, this is the only position that prevents irreversible physical damage to the intersex person's body, that respects the intersex person's agency regarding his/her own flesh, and that recognizes genital sensation and erotic functioning to be at least as important as reproductive capacity. If an intersex child or adult decides to change gender or to undergo surgical or hormonal alteration of his/her body, that decision should also be fully respected and facilitated. The key point is that intersex subjects should not be violated for the comfort and convenience of others.

One part of reaching ISNA's long-term goal has been to document the emotional and physical carnage resulting from medical interventions. As a rapidly growing literature makes abundantly clear (see the bibliography on our website, <http://www.isna.org/bigbib.html>), the medical management of intersexuality has changed little in the forty years since my first surgery. Kessler expresses surprise that "in spite of the thousands of genital operations performed every year, there are no meta-analyses from within the medical community on levels of success."²⁵ They do not know whether postsurgical intersexuals are "silent and happy or silent and unhappy."²⁶ There is no research effort to improve erotic functioning for adult intersexuals whose genitals have been altered, nor are there psychotherapists specializing in working with adult intersex clients trying to heal from the trauma of medical intervention. To provide a counterpoint to the mountains of medical literature that neglect intersex experience and to begin compiling an ethnographic account of that experience, ISNA's *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* newsletter has developed into a forum for intersexuals to tell their own stories. We have sent complimentary copies of the newsletter filled with searing personal narratives to academics, writers, journalists, minority rights organizations, and medical practitioners—to anybody we thought might make a difference in our campaign to change the way intersex bodies are managed.

ISNA's presence has begun to generate effects. It has helped politicize the growing number of intersex organizations, as well as intersex identities themselves. When I first began organizing ISNA, I met leaders of the Turner's Syndrome Society, the oldest known support group focusing on atypical sexual differentiation, founded in 1987. Turner's Syndrome is defined by an XO genetic karyotype that results in a female body morphology with non-functioning ovaries, extremely short stature, and a variety of other physical differences described in the medical literature with such stigmatizing labels as "web-necked" and "fish-mouthed." Each of these women told me what a profound, life-changing experience it had been simply to meet another person like herself. I was inspired by their accomplishments (they are a national organization serving thousands of members), but I wanted ISNA to have a different focus. I was less willing to think of intersexuality as a pathology or disability, more interested in challenging its medicalization entirely, and more interested still in politicizing a pan-intersexual identity across the divisions of particular etiologies in order to destabilize more effectively the heteronormative assumptions underlying the violence directed at our bodies.

When I established ISNA in 1993, no such politicized groups existed. In the United Kingdom in 1988, the mother of a girl with androgen-insensitivity syndrome (AIS, which produces genetic males with female genital morphologies) formed the AIS Support Group. The group, which initially lobbied for increased medical attention (better surgical techniques for producing greater vaginal depth, more research into the osteoporosis that often attends AIS), now has chapters in five countries. Another group, K. S. and Associates, was formed in 1989 by the mother of a boy with Klinefelter's Syndrome and today serves over one thousand families. Klinefelter's is characterized by the presence of one or more additional X chromosomes, which produce bodies with fairly masculine external genitals, above-average height, and somewhat gangly limbs. At puberty, people with K. S. often

experience pelvic broadening and the development of breasts. K. S. and Associates continues to be dominated by parents, is highly medical in orientation, and has resisted attempts by adult Klinefelter's Syndrome men to discuss gender identity or sexual orientation issues related to their intersex condition.

Since ISNA has been on the scene, other groups with a more resistant stance vis-à-vis the medical establishment have begun to appear. In 1995, a mother who refused medical pressure for female assignment for her intersex child formed the Ambiguous Genitalia Support Network, which introduces parents of intersexuals to each other and encourages the development of pen-pal support relationships. In 1996, another mother who had rejected medical pressure to assign her intersex infant as a female by removing his penis formed the Hermaphrodite Education and Listening Post (HELP) to provide peer support and medical information. Neither of these parent-oriented groups, however, frames its work in overtly political terms. Still, political analysis and action of the sort advocated by ISNA has not been without effect on the more narrowly defined service-oriented or parent-dominated groups. The AIS Support Group, now more representative of both adults and parents, noted in a recent newsletter,

Our first impression of ISNA was that they were perhaps a bit too angry and militant to gain the support of the medical profession. However, we have to say that, having read [political analyses of intersexuality by ISNA, Kessler, Fausto-Sterling, and Holmes], we feel that the feminist concepts relating to the patriarchal treatment of intersexuality are extremely interesting and do make a lot of sense. After all, the lives of intersexed people are stigmatized by the cultural disapproval of their genital appearance, [which need not] affect their experience as sexual human beings.²⁷

Other more militant groups have now begun to pop up. In 1994, German intersexuals formed both the Workgroup on Violence in Pediatrics and Gynecology and the Genital Mutilation Survivors' Support Network, and Hijra Nippon now represents activist intersexuals in Japan.

Outside the rather small community of intersex organizations, ISNA's work has generated a complex patchwork of alliances and oppositions. Queer activists, especially transgender activists, have provided encouragement, advice, and logistical support to the intersex movement. The direct action group Transsexual Menace helped an ad hoc group of militant intersexuals calling themselves Hermaphrodites with Attitude plan and carry out a picket of the 1996 annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Boston—the first recorded instance of intersex public protest in modern history.²⁸ ISNA was also invited to join GenderPAC, a recently formed national consortium of transgender organizations that lobbies against discrimination based on atypical expressions of gender or embodiment. More mainstream gay and lesbian political organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force have also been willing to include intersex concerns as part of their political agendas. Transgender and lesbian/gay groups have been supportive of intersex political activism largely because they see similarities in the medicalization of these various identities as a form of social control and (especially for transsexuals) empathize with our struggle to assert agency within a medical discourse that works to efface the ability to exercise informed consent about what happens to one's own body.

Gay/lesbian caucuses and special interest groups within professional medical associations have been especially receptive to ISNA's agenda. One physician on the Internet discussion group glb-medical wrote:

The effect of Cheryl Chase's postings—admittedly, after the shock wore off—was to make me realize that THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TREATED might very well think [they had not been well served by medical intervention]. This matters a lot. As a gay man, and simply as a person, I have struggled for much of my adult life to find my own natural self, to disentangle the confusions caused by others' presumptions about how I am/should be. But, thankfully, their decisions were not surgically imposed on me!

Queer psychiatrists, starting with Bill Byne at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, have been quick to support ISNA, in part because the psychological principles underlying the current intersex treatment protocols are manifestly unsound. They seem almost willfully designed to exacerbate rather than ameliorate already difficult emotional issues arising from sexual difference. Some of these psychiatrists see the surgical and endocrinological domination of a problem that even surgeons and endocrinologists acknowledge to be psychosocial rather than biomedical as an unjustified invasion of their area of professional competence.

ISNA has deliberately cultivated a network of nonintersexed advocates who command a measure of social legitimacy and can speak in contexts where uninterpreted intersex voices will not be heard. Because there is a strong impulse to discount what intersexuals have to say about intersexuality, sympathetic representation has been welcome—especially in helping intersexuals reframe intersexuality in nonmedical terms. Some gender theory scholars, feminist critics of science, medical historians, and anthropologists have been quick to understand and support intersex activism. Years before ISNA came into existence, feminist biologist and science studies scholar Anne Fausto-Sterling had written about intersexuality in relation to intellectually suspect scientific practices that perpetuate masculinist constructs of gender, and she became an early ISNA ally.²⁹ Likewise, social psy-

chologist Suzanne Kessler had written a brilliant ethnography of surgeons who specialize in treating intersexuals. After speaking with several “products” of their practice, she, too, became a strong supporter of intersex activism.³⁰ Historian of science Alice Dreger, whose work focuses not only on hermaphroditism but on other forms of potentially benign atypical embodiment that become subject to destructively normalizing medical interventions (conjoined twins, for example), has been especially supportive. Fausto-Sterling, Kessler, and Dreger will each shortly publish works that analyze the medical treatment of intersexuality as being culturally motivated and criticize it as harmful to its ostensible patients.³¹

Allies who help contest the medicalization of intersexuality are especially important because ISNA has found it almost entirely fruitless to attempt direct, nonconfrontational interactions with the medical specialists who themselves determine policy on the treatment of intersex infants and who actually carry out the surgeries. Joycelyn Elders, the Clinton administration’s first surgeon general, is a pediatric endocrinologist with many years of experience managing intersex infants but, in spite of a generally feminist approach to health care and frequent overtures from ISNA, she has been dismissive of the concerns of intersexuals themselves.³² Another pediatrician remarked in an Internet discussion on intersexuality: “I think this whole issue is preposterous. . . . To suggest that [medical decisions about the treatment of intersex conditions] are somehow cruel or arbitrary is insulting, ignorant and misguided. . . . To spread the claims that [ISNA] is making is just plain wrong, and I hope that this [on-line group of doctors and scientists] will not blindly accept them.” Yet another participant in that same chat asked what was for him obviously a rhetorical question: “Who is the enemy? I really don’t think it’s the medical establishment. Since when did we establish the male/female hegemony?” While a surgeon quoted in a *New York Times* article on ISNA summarily dismissed us as “zealots,”³³

there is considerable anecdotal information supplied by ISNA sympathizers that professional meetings in the fields of pediatrics, urology, genital plastic surgery, and endocrinology are buzzing with anxious and defensive discussions of intersex activism. In response to the Hermaphrodites with Attitude protests at the American Academy of Pediatrics meeting, that organization felt compelled to issue the following statement to the press: "The Academy is deeply concerned about the emotional, cognitive, and body image development of intersexuals, and believes that successful early genital surgery minimizes these issues." Further protests were planned for 1997.

The roots of resistance to the truth claims of intersexuals run deep in the medical establishment. Not only does ISNA critique the normativist biases couched within most scientific practice, it advocates a treatment protocol for intersex infants that disrupts conventional understandings of the relationship between bodies and genders. But on a level more personally threatening to medical practitioners, ISNA's position implies that they have—unwittingly at best, through willful denial at worst—spent their careers inflicting a profound harm from which their patients will never fully recover. ISNA's position threatens to destroy the assumptions motivating an entire medical subspecialty, thus jeopardizing the ability to perform what many surgeons find to be technically difficult and fascinating work. Melissa Hendricks notes that Dr. Gearhart is known to colleagues as a surgical "artist" who can "carve a large phallus down into a clitoris" with consummate skill.³⁴ More than one ISNA member has discovered that surgeons actually operated on their genitals at no charge. The medical establishment's fascination with its own power to change sex and its drive to rescue parents from their intersex children are so strong that heroic interventions are delivered without regard to the capitalist model that ordinarily governs medical services.

Given such deep and mutually reinforcing reasons for opposing ISNA's position, it is hardly surprising that medical intersex specialists have, for the most part, turned a deaf ear toward us. The lone exception as of April 1997 is urologist Justine Schober. After watching a videotape of the 1996 ISNA retreat and receiving other input from HELP and the AIS Support Group, she suggests in a new textbook on pediatric surgery that while technology has advanced to the point that "our needs [as surgeons] and the needs of parents to have a presentable child can be satisfied," it is time to acknowledge that problems exist that "we as surgeons . . . cannot address. Success in psychosocial adjustment is the true goal of sexual assignment and genitoplasty. . . . Surgery makes parents and doctors comfortable, but counseling makes people comfortable too, and is not irreversible."³⁵

While ISNA will continue to approach the medical establishment for dialogue (and continue supporting protests outside the closed doors when doctors refuse to talk), perhaps the most important aspect of our current activities is the struggle to change public perceptions. By using the mass media, the Internet, and our growing network of allies and sympathizers to make the general public aware of the frequency of intersexuality and of the intense suffering that medical treatment has caused, we seek to create an environment in which many parents of intersex children will have already heard about the intersex movement when their child is born. Such informed parents we hope will be better able to resist medical pressure for unnecessary genital surgery and secrecy and to find their way to a peer-support group and counseling rather than to a surgical theater.

FIRST-WORLD FEMINISM, AFRICAN CLITORECTOMY, AND INTERSEX GENITAL MUTILATION

We must first locate and challenge our own position as rigorously as we challenge that of others.

—Salem Mekuria, “Female Genital Mutilation in Africa”

Traditional African practices that remove the clitoris and other parts of female genitals have lately been a target of intense media coverage and feminist activism in the United States and other industrialized Western societies. The euphemism *female circumcision* largely has been supplanted by the politicized term *female genital mutilation* (FGM). Analogous operations performed on intersexuals in the United States have not been the focus of similar attention —indeed, attempts to link the two forms of genital cutting have met with multiform resistance. Examining how first-world feminists and mainstream media treat traditional African practices and comparing that treatment with their responses to intersex genital mutilation (IGM) in North America exposes some of the complex interactions between ideologies of race, gender, colonialism, and science that effectively silence and render invisible intersex experience in first-world contexts. Cutting intersex genitals becomes yet another hidden mechanism for imposing normalcy upon unruly flesh, a means of containing the potential anarchy of desires and identifications within oppressive heteronormative structures.

In 1994, the *New England Journal of Medicine* paired an article on the physical harm resulting from African genital surgery with an editorial denouncing clitorectomy as a violation of human rights but declined to run a reply drafted by University of California at Berkeley medical anthropologist Lawrence Cohen and two ISNA members detailing the harm caused by medicalized American clitorectomies.³⁶ In response to growing media attention, Congress passed the Federal Prohibition of Female

Genital Mutilation Act in October 1996, but the act specifically exempted from prohibition medicalized clitorectomies of the sort performed to “correct” intersex bodies. The bill’s principal author, former Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, received and ignored many letters from ISNA members and Brown University professor of medical science Anne Fausto-Sterling asking her to recast the bill’s language. The *Boston Globe*’s syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman is one of the few journalists covering African FGM to respond to ISNA. “I must admit I was not aware of this situation,” she wrote to me in 1994. “I admire your courage.” She continued, however, regularly to discuss African FGM in her column without mentioning similar American practices. One of her October 1995 columns on FGM was promisingly titled, “We Don’t Want to Believe It Happens Here,” but it discussed only immigrants to the United States from third-world countries who performed clitorectomies on their daughters in keeping with the practices of their native cultures.

While clitor ectomized African immigrant women doing anti-FGM activism in the United States have been receptive to the claims made by intersex opponents to medicalized clitor ectomies and are in dialogue with us, first-world feminists and organizations working on African FGM have totally ignored us. To my knowledge, only two of the many anti-FGM groups contacted have responded to repeated overtures from intersex activists. Fran Hosken, who since 1982 has regularly published a catalogue of statistics on female genital mutilation worldwide, wrote me a terse note saying that “we are not concerned with biological exceptions.”³⁷ Forward International, another anti-FGM organization, replied to an inquiry from German intersexual Heike Spreitzer that her letter was “most interesting” but that they could not help because their work focuses only on “female genital mutilation that is performed as a harmful cultural or traditional practice on young girls.” As Forward International’s reply to Spreitzer demonstrates, many first-world anti-FGM

activists seemingly consider Africans to have “harmful cultural or traditional practices,” while we in the modern industrialized West presumably have something better. We have science, which is linked to the metanarratives of enlightenment, progress, and truth. Genital cutting is condoned to the extent that it supports these cultural self-conceptions.

Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem set the tone for subsequent first-world feminist analyses of FGM with their pathbreaking article in the March 1980 issue of *Ms.* magazine, “The International Crime of Genital Mutilation.”³⁸ A disclaimer warns, “These words are painful to read. They describe facts of life as far away as our most fearful imagination—and as close as any denial of women’s sexual freedom.” For *Ms.* readers, whom the editors imagine are more likely to experience the pain of genital mutilation between the covers of their magazine than between their thighs, clitorrectomy is presented as a fact of foreign life whose principal relevance to their readership is that it exemplifies a loss of “freedom,” that most cherished possession of the liberal Western subject. The article features a photograph of an African girl with her legs held open by the arm of an unseen woman to her right. To her left is the disembodied hand of the midwife, holding the razor blade with which she has just performed a ritual clitorrectomy. The girl’s face—mouth open, eyes bulging—is a mask of pain. In more than fifteen years of coverage, Western images of African practices have changed little. “Americans made a horrifying discovery this year,” *Life* soberly informed its readers in January 1997 while showing a two-page photo spread of a Kenyan girl held from behind as unseen hands cut her genitals.³⁹ The 1996 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography went to yet another portrayal of a Kenyan clitorrectomy.⁴⁰ And in the wake of Fauziya Kassindja’s successful bid for asylum in the United States after fleeing clitorrectomy in Togo, the number of FGM images available from her country has skyrocketed.⁴¹

These representations all manifest a profound othering of African clitorrectomy that contributes to the silence surrounding similar medicalized practices in the industrialized West. “Their” genital cutting is barbaric ritual; “ours” is scientific. Theirs disfigures; ours normalizes the deviant. The colonialist implications of these representations of genital cutting are even more glaringly obvious when images of intersex surgeries are juxtaposed with images of African FGM. Medical books describing how to perform clitoral surgery on white North American intersex children are almost always illustrated with extreme genital close-ups, disconnecting the genitals not only from the individual intersexed person but from the body itself. Full-body shots always have the eyes blacked out. Why is it considered necessary to black out the eyes of clitorrectomized American girls—thus preserving a shred of their privacy and helping ward off the viewer’s identification with the abject image—but not the eyes of the clitorrectomized African girls in the pages of American magazines?⁴²

First-world feminist discourse locates clitorrectomy not only “elsewhere,” in Africa, but also “elsewhen” in time. A recent *Atlantic Monthly* article on African clitorrectomy asserted that the “American medical profession stopped performing clitoridectomies decades ago,” and the magazine has since declined to publish a contradictory letter to the editor from ISNA.⁴³ Academic publications are as prone to this attitude as the popular press. In the recent *Deviant Bodies* anthology, visual artist Susan Jahoda’s “Theatres of Madness” juxtaposes nineteenth- and twentieth-century material depicting “the conceptual interdependence of sexuality, reproduction, family life, and ‘female disorders.’”⁴⁴ To represent twentieth-century medical clitorrectomy practices, Jahoda quotes a July 1980 letter written to *Ms.* magazine in response to Morgan and Steinem. The letter writer, a nurse’s aide in a geriatric home, said she had been puzzled by the strange scars she saw on the genitals of five of the forty women in her care: “Then I read your article. . . . My God! Why? Who decided to

deny them orgasm? Who made them go through such a procedure? I want to know. Was it fashionable? Or was it to correct 'a condition'? I'd like to know what this so-called civilized country used as its criteria for such a procedure. And how widespread is it here in the United States?"⁴⁵ While Jahoda's selection of this letter does raise the issue of medicalized American clitorectomies, it safely locates the genital cutting in the past, as something experienced a long time ago by women now in their later stages of life.

Significantly, Jahoda literally passed over an excellent opportunity to comment on the continuing practice of clitorectomy in the contemporary United States. Two months earlier, in the April 1980 issue of *Ms.*, feminist biologists Ruth Hubbard and Patricia Farnes also replied to Morgan and Steinem:

We want to draw the attention of your readers to the practice of clitoridectomy not only in the Third World . . . but right here in the United States, where it is used as part of a procedure to "repair" by "plastic surgery" so-called genital ambiguities. Few people realize that this procedure has routinely involved removal of the entire clitoris and its nerve supply—in other words, total clitoridectomy. . . . In a lengthy article, [Johns Hopkins intersex expert John] Money and two colleagues write . . . that "a three-year old girl about to be clitoridectomized . . . should be well informed that *the doctors will make her look like all other girls and women*" (our emphasis), which is not unlike what North African girls are often told about their clitoridectomies. . . . But to date, neither Money nor his critics have investigated the effect of clitoridectomies on the girls' development. Yet one would surely expect this to affect their psychosexual development and their feelings of identity as young women.⁴⁶

While Farnes and Hubbard's prescient feminist exposé of medicalized clitorectomies in the contemporary United States sank

without a trace, there has been an explosion of work that keeps “domestic” clitorrectomy at a safe distance. Such conceptualizations of clitorrectomy’s geographical and temporal cultural remoteness allow first-world feminist outrage to be diverted into potentially colonialist meddling in the social affairs of others while hampering work for social justice at home.⁴⁷

Feminism represents itself as being interested in unmasking the silence that surrounds violence against women. Most medical intersex management is another form of violence based on a sexist devaluing of female pain and female sexuality. Doctors consider the prospect of growing up as a boy with a small penis to be a worse alternative than growing up as a girl sans clitoris and ovaries; they gender intersex bodies accordingly and cut them up to make the assigned genders support cultural norms of embodiment. These medical interventions transform many transgressive bodies into ones that can be labeled safely as women and subjected to the many forms of social control with which women must contend. Why then have most first-world feminists met intersexuals with a blank stare?

Intersexuals have had such difficulty generating mainstream feminist support not only because of the racist and colonialist frameworks that situate clitorrectomy as a practice foreign to proper subjects within the first world but also because intersexuality undermines the stability of the category “woman” that undergirds much of first-world feminist discourse. We call into question the assumed relation between genders and bodies and demonstrate how some bodies do not fit easily into male/female dichotomies. We embody viscerally the truth of Judith Butler’s dictum that “sex,” the concept that accomplishes the materialization and naturalization of power-laden, culturally constructed differences, has really been “gender all along.”⁴⁸ By refusing to remain silenced, we queer the foundations upon which depend not only the medical management of bodies but also widely shared femi-

nist assumptions of properly embodied feminine subjectivity. To the extent that we are not normatively female or normatively women, we are not considered the proper subjects of feminist concern.

As unwilling subjects of science and improper subjects of feminism, politicized intersex activists have deep stakes in allying with and participating in the sorts of poststructuralist cultural work that exposes the foundational assumptions about personhood shared by the dominant society, conventional feminism, and many other identity-based oppositional social movements. We have a stake, too, in the efforts of gender queers to carve out livable social spaces for reconfigured forms of embodiment, identity, and desire. In 1990, Suzanne Kessler noted that “the possibilities for real societal transformations would be unlimited” if physicians and scientists specializing in the management of gender could recognize that “finally, and always, people construct gender as well as the social systems that are grounded in gender-based concepts. . . . Accepting genital ambiguity as a natural option would require that physicians also acknowledge that genital ambiguity is ‘corrected’ not because it is threatening to the infant’s life but because it is threatening to the infant’s culture.”⁴⁹ At that time, intersexuals had not yet been heard from, and there was little reason to think that physicians or other members of their culture would ever reflect on the meaning or effect of what they were doing. The advent of an activist intersex opposition changes everything.

NOTES

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Andrea Smith

HETERO PATRIARCHY & THE THREE PILLARS OF WHITE SUPREMACY

RETHINKING WOMEN OF COLOR ORGANIZING

Scenario #1 A group of women of color come together to organize. An argument ensues about whether or not Arab women should be included. Some argue that Arab women are “white” since they have been classified as such in the US census. Another argument erupts over whether or not Latinas qualify as “women of color,” since some may be classified as “white” in their Latin American countries of origin and/or “pass” as white in the United States.

Scenario #2 In a discussion on racism, some people argue that Native peoples suffer from less racism than other people of color because they generally do not reside in segregated neighborhoods within the United States. In addition, some argue that since tribes now have gaming, Native peoples are no longer “oppressed.”

Scenario #3 A multiracial campaign develops involving diverse communities of color in which some participants charge that we must stop the black/white binary, and end Black hegemony over people of color politics to develop a more “multicultural” framework. However, this campaign continues to rely on strategies and cultural motifs developed by the Black Civil Rights struggle in the United States.

These incidents, which happen quite frequently in “women of color” or “people of color” political organizing struggles, are often explained as a consequence of “oppression olympics.” That is to say, one problem we have is that we are too busy fighting over who is more oppressed. In this essay, I want to argue that these incidents are not so much the result of “oppression olympics” but are more about how we have inadequately framed “women of color” or “people of color” politics. That is, the premise behind much “women of color” organizing is that women from communities victimized by white supremacy should unite together around their shared oppression. This framework might be represented by a diagram of five overlapping circles, each marked Native women, Black women, Arab/Muslim women, Latinas, and Asian American women, overlapping like a Venn diagram.

This framework has proven to be limited for women of color and people of color organizing. First, it tends to presume that our communities have been impacted by white supremacy in the same way. Consequently, we often assume that all of our communities will share similar strategies for liberation. In fact, however, our strategies often run into conflict. For example, one strategy that many people in US-born communities of color adopt, in order to advance economically out of impoverished communities, is to join the military. We then become complicit in oppressing and colonizing communities from other countries. Meanwhile, people from other countries often adopt the strategy of moving to the United States to advance economically, without consider-

ing their complicity in settling on the lands of indigenous peoples that are being colonized by the United States.

Consequently, it may be more helpful to adopt an alternative framework for women of color and people of color organizing. I call one such framework the “Three Pillars of White Supremacy.” This framework does not assume that racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics. Envision three pillars, one labeled Slavery/Capitalism, another labeled Genocide/Capitalism, and the last one labeled Orientalism/War, as well as arrows connecting each of the pillars together.

SLAVERY/CAPITALISM

One pillar of white supremacy is the logic of slavery. As Sora Han, Jared Sexton, and Angela P. Harris note, this logic renders Black people as inherently slaveable—as nothing more than property.¹ That is, in this logic of white supremacy, Blackness becomes equated with slaveability. The forms of slavery may change whether it is through the formal system of slavery, sharecropping, or through the current prison-industrial complex-but the logic itself has remained consistent.

This logic is the anchor of capitalism. That is, the capitalist system ultimately commodifies all workers—one’s own person becomes a commodity that one must sell in the labor market while the profits of one’s work are taken by someone else. To keep this capitalist system in place—which ultimately commodifies most people—the logic of slavery applies a racial hierarchy to this system. This racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism. This helps people who are not Black to accept their lot in life, because they can feel that at least they are not at the

very bottom of the racial hierarchy—at least they are not property; at least they are not slaveable.

The logic of slavery can be seen clearly in the current prison industrial complex (PIC). While the PIC generally incarcerates communities of color, it seems to be structured primarily on an anti-Black racism. That is, prior to the Civil War, most people in prison were white. However, after the thirteenth amendment was passed—which banned slavery, except for those in prison—Black people previously enslaved through the slavery system were reenslaved through the prison system. Black people who had been the property of slave owners became state property, through the conflict leasing system. Thus, we can actually look at the criminalization of Blackness as a logical extension of Blackness as property.

GENOCIDE/COLONIALISM

A second pillar of white supremacy is the logic of genocide. This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must *always* be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous-land, resources, indigenous spirituality, or culture. As Kate Shanley notes, Native peoples are a permanent “present absence” in the US colonial imagination, an “absence” that reinforces, at every turn, the conviction that Native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified. Ella Shoat and Robert Stam describe this absence as “an ambivalently repressive mechanism [which] dispels the anxiety in the face of the Indian, whose very presence is a reminder of the initially precarious grounding of the American nation-state itself... In a temporal paradox, living Indians were induced to ‘play dead,’ as it were, in order to perform a narrative of manifest destiny in which their role, ultimately, was to disappear.”²

Rayna Green further elaborates that the current Indian “wannabe” phenomenon is based on a logic of genocide: non-Native peoples imagine themselves as the rightful inheritors of all that previously belonged to “vanished” Indians, thus entitling them to ownership of this land. “The living performance of ‘playing Indian’ by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians. In that sense, the performance, purportedly often done out of a stated and implicit love for Indians, is really the obverse of another well-known cultural phenomenon, ‘Indian hating,’ as most often expressed in another, deadly performance genre called ‘genocide.’”³ After all, why would non-Native peoples need to play Indian—which often includes acts of spiritual appropriation and land theft—if they thought Indians were still alive and perfectly capable of being Indian themselves? The pillar of genocide serves as the anchor for colonialism—it is what allows non-Native peoples to feel they can rightfully own indigenous peoples’ land. It is okay to take land from indigenous peoples, because indigenous peoples have disappeared.

ORIENTALISM/WAR

A third pillar of white supremacy is the logic of Orientalism. Orientalism was defined by Edward Said as the process of the West defining itself as a superior civilization by constructing itself in opposition to an “exotic” but inferior “Orient.” (Here I am using the term “Orientalism” more broadly than to solely signify what has been historically named as the Orient or Asia.) The logic of Orientalism marks certain peoples or nations as inferior and as posing a constant threat to the well being of empire. These peoples are still seen as “civilizations”—they are not property or “disappeared”—however, they will always be imaged as permanent foreign threats to empire. This logic is evident in the anti-immigration movements within the United States that target immigrants of color. It does not matter how long immigrants of

color reside in the United States, they generally become targeted as foreign threats, particularly during wartime. Consequently, orientalism serves as the anchor for war, because it allows the United States to justify being in a constant state of war to protect itself from its enemies.

For example, the United States feels entitled to use Orientalist logic to justify racial profiling of Arab Americans so that it can be strong enough to fight the “war on terror.” Orientalism also allows the United States to defend the logics of slavery and genocide, as these practices enable the United States to stay “strong enough” to fight these constant wars. What becomes clear then is what Sora Han states the United States is not at war; the United States *is* war.⁴ For the system of white supremacy to stay in place, the United States must always be at war.

Because we are situated within different logics of white supremacy, we may misunderstand a racial dynamic if we simplistically try to explain one logic of white supremacy with another logic. For instance, think about the first scenario that opens this essay: if we simply dismiss Latino/as or Arab peoples as “white,” we fail to understand how a racial logic of Orientalism is in operation. That is, Latino/as and Arabs are often situated in a racial hierarchy that privileges them over Black people. However, while Orientalist logic may bestow them some racial privilege, they are still cast as inferior yet threatening “civilizations” in the United States. Their privilege is not a signal that they will be assimilated, but that they will be marked as perpetual foreign threats to the US world order.

ORGANIZING IMPLICATIONS

Under the old but still potent and dominant model, people of color organizing was based on the notion of organizing around shared victimhood. In this model, however, we see that we are

victims of white supremacy, but complicit in it as well. Our survival strategies and resistance to white supremacy are set by the system of white supremacy itself. What keeps us trapped within our particular pillars of white supremacy is that we are seduced with the prospect of being able to participate in the other pillars. For example, all non-Native peoples are promised the ability to join in the colonial project of settling indigenous lands. All non-Black peoples are promised that if they comply, they will not be at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. And Black, Native, Latino, and Asian peoples are promised that they will economically and politically advance if they join US wars to spread “democracy.” Thus, people of color organizing must be premised on making strategic alliances with each other, based on where we are situated within the larger political economy. Thus, for example, Native peoples who are organizing against the colonial and genocidal practices committed by the US government will be more effective in their struggle if they also organize against US militarism, particularly the military recruitment of indigenous peoples to support US imperial wars. If we try to end US colonial practices at home, but support US empire by joining the military, we are strengthening the state’s ability to carry out genocidal policies against people of color here and all over the world.

This way, our alliances would not be solely based on shared victimization, but where we are complicit in the victimization of others. These approaches might help us to develop resistance strategies that do not inadvertently keep the system in place for all of us, and keep all of us accountable. In all of these cases, we would check our aspirations against the aspirations of other communities to ensure that our model of liberation does not become the model of oppression for others.

These practices require us to be more vigilant in how we may have internalized some of these logics in our own organizing practice. For instance, much racial justice organizing within the

United States has rested on a civil rights framework that fights for equality under the law. An assumption behind this organizing is that the United States is a democracy with some flaws, but is otherwise admirable. Despite the fact that it rendered slaves three-fifths of a person, the US Constitution is presented as the model document from which to build a flourishing democracy. However, as Luana Ross notes, it has never been against US law to commit genocide against indigenous peoples—in fact, genocide *is* the law of the country. The United States could not exist without it. In the United States, democracy is actually the alibi for genocide—it is the practice that covers up United States colonial control over indigenous lands.

Our organizing can also reflect anti-Black racism. Recently, with the outgrowth of “multiculturalism” there have been calls to “go beyond the black/white binary” and include other communities of color in our analysis, as presented in the third scenario. There are a number of flaws with this analysis. First, it replaces an analysis of white supremacy with a politics of multicultural representation; if we just *include* more people, then our practice will be less racist. Not true. This model does not address the nuanced structure of white supremacy, such as through these distinct logics of slavery, genocide, and Orientalism. Second, it obscures the centrality of the slavery logic in the system of white supremacy, which is *based on a black/white binary*. The black/white binary is not the *only* binary which characterizes white supremacy, but it is still a central one that we cannot “go beyond” in our racial justice organizing efforts.

If we do not look at how the logic of slaveability inflects our society and our thinking, it will be evident in our work as well. For example, other communities of color often appropriate the cultural work and organizing strategies of African American civil rights or Black Power movements without corresponding assumptions that we should also be in solidarity with Black com-

munities. We assume that this work is the common “property” of all oppressed groups, and we can appropriate it without being accountable.

Angela P. Harris and Juan Perea debate the usefulness of the black/white binary in the book, *Critical Race Theory*. Perea complains that the black/white binary fails to *include* the experiences of other people of color. However, he fails to identify alternative racializing logics to the black/white paradigm.⁵ Meanwhile, Angela P. Harris argues that “the story of ‘race’ itself is that of the construction of Blackness and whiteness. In this story, Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinos/as do exist. But their roles are subsidiary to the fundamental binary national drama. As a political claim, Black exceptionalism exposes the deep mistrust and tensions among American ethnic groups racialized as nonwhite.”⁶

Let’s examine these statements in conversation with each other. Simply saying we need to move beyond the black/white binary (or perhaps, the “black/nonblack” binary) in US racism obfuscates the racializing logic of slavery, and prevents us from seeing that this binary constitutes Blackness as the bottom of a color hierarchy. However, this is not the *only* binary that fundamentally constitutes white supremacy. There is also an indigenous/settler binary, where Native genocide is central to the logic of white supremacy and other non-indigenous people of color also form “a subsidiary” role. We also face another Orientalist logic that fundamentally constitutes Asians, Arabs, and Latino/as as foreign threats, requiring the United States to be at permanent war with these peoples. In this construction, Black and Native peoples play subsidiary roles.

Clearly the black/white binary is central to racial and political thought and practice in the United States, and any understanding of white supremacy must take it into consideration. However, if we look at only this binary, we may misread the dynamics

of white supremacy in different contexts. For example, critical race theorist Cheryl Harris's analysis of whiteness as property reveals this weakness. In *Critical Race Theory*, Harris contends that whites have a property interest in the preservation of whiteness, and seek to deprive those who are "tainted" by Black or Indian blood from these same white property interests. Harris simply assumes that the positions of African Americans and American Indians are the same, failing to consider US policies of forced assimilation and forced whiteness on American Indians. These policies have become so entrenched that when Native peoples make political claims, they have been accused of being white. When Andrew Jackson removed the Cherokee along the Trail of Tears, he argued that those who did not want removal were really white? In contemporary times, when I was a non-violent witness for the Chippewa spearfishers in the late 1980s, one of the more frequent slurs whites hurled when the Chippewa attempted to exercise their treaty-protected right to fish was that they had white parents, or they were really white.

Status differences between Blacks and Natives are informed by the different economic positions African Americans and American Indians have in US society. African Americans have been traditionally valued for their labor, hence it is in the interest of the dominant society to have as many people marked "Black," as possible, thereby maintaining a cheap labor pool; by contrast, American Indians have been valued for the land base they occupy, so it is in the interest of dominant society to have as few people marked "Indian" as possible, facilitating access to Native lands. "Whiteness" operates differently under a logic of genocide than it does from a logic of slavery.

Another failure of US-based people of color in organizing is that we often fall back on a "US-centricism," believing that what is happening "over there" is less important than what is happening here. We fail to see how the United States maintains the system

of oppression here precisely by tying our allegiances to the interests of US empire “over there.”

HETEROPATRIARCHY AND WHITE SUPREMACY

Heteropatriarchy is the building block of US empire. In fact, it is the building block of the nation-state form of governance. Christian Right authors make these links in their analysis of imperialism and empire. For example, Christian Right activist and founder of Prison Fellowship Charles Colson makes the connection between homosexuality and the nation-state in his analysis of the war on terror, explaining that one of the causes of terrorism is same-sex marriage:

Marriage is the traditional building block of human society, intended both to unite couples and bring children into the world... There is a natural moral order for the family... the family, led by a married mother and father, is the best available structure for both childrearing and cultural health. Marriage is not a private institution designed solely for the individual gratification of its participants. If we fail to enact a Federal Marriage Amendment, we can expect not just more family breakdown, but also more criminals behind bars and more chaos in our streets.⁸

Colson is linking the well-being of US empire to the well-being of the heteropatriarchal family. He continues:

When radical Islamists see American women abusing Muslim men, as they did in the Abu Ghraib prison, and when they see news coverage of same-sex couples being “married” in US towns, we make this kind of freedom abhorrent—the kind they see as a blot on Allah’s creation. We must preserve traditional marriage in order to protect the United States from those who would use our depravity to destroy us.⁹

As Ann Burlein argues in *Lift High the Cross*, it may be a mistake to argue that the goal of Christian Right politics is to create a theocracy in the United States. Rather, Christian Right politics work through the private family (which is coded as white, patriarchal, and middle class) to create a "Christian America." She notes that the investment in the private family makes it difficult for people to invest in more public forms of social connection. In addition, investment in the suburban private family serves to mask the public disinvestment in urban areas that makes the suburban lifestyle possible. The social decay in urban areas that results from this disinvestment is then construed as the result of deviance from the Christian family ideal rather than as the result of political and economic forces. As former head of the Christian Coalition, Ralph Reed, states: "The only true solution to crime is to restore the family," IO and "Family break-up causes poverty."¹¹ Concludes Burlein, "The family' is no mere metaphor but a crucial technology by which modern power is produced and exercised."¹²

As I have argued elsewhere, in order to colonize peoples whose societies are not based on social hierarchy, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy.¹³ In turn, patriarchy rests on a gender binary system in which only two genders exist, one dominating the other. Consequently, Charles Colson *is* correct when he says that the colonial world order depends on heteronormativity. Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-state rule their citizens. Any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy. Rather, as Cathy Cohen contends, such struggles will maintain colonialism based on a politics of secondary marginalization where the most elite class of these groups will further their aspirations on the backs of those most marginalized within the community.¹⁴

Through this process of secondary marginalization, the national or racial justice struggle takes on either implicitly or explicitly a nation-state model as the end point of its struggle—a model of governance in which the elites govern the rest through violence and domination, as well as exclude those who are not members of “the nation.”

Thus, national liberation politics become less vulnerable to being coopted by the Right when we base them on a model of liberation that fundamentally challenges right-wing conceptions of the nation. We need a model based on community relationships and on mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

Women of color-centered organizing points to the centrality of gender politics within antiracist, anti-colonial struggles. Unfortunately, in our efforts to organize against white, Christian America, racial justice struggles often articulate an equally heteropatriarchal racial nationalism. This model of organizing either hopes to assimilate into white America, or to replicate it within an equally hierarchical and oppressive racial nationalism in which the elites of the community rule everyone else. Such struggles often call on the importance of preserving the “Black family” or the “Native family” as the bulwark of this nationalist project, the family being conceived of in capitalist and heteropatriarchal terms. The response is often increased homophobia, with lesbian and gay community members construed as “threats” to the family. But, perhaps we should challenge the “concept” of the family itself. Perhaps, instead, we can reconstitute alternative ways of living together in which “families” are not seen as islands on their own. Certainly, indigenous communities were not ordered on the basis of a nuclear family structure—is the result of colonialism, not the antidote to it.

In proposing this model, I am speaking from my particular position in indigenous struggles. Other peoples might flesh out these logics more fully from different vantage points. Others might also argue that there are other logics of white supremacy are missing. Still others might complicate how they relate to each other. But I see this as a starting point for women of color organizers that will allow us to reenvision a politics of solidarity that goes beyond multiculturalism, and develop more complicated strategies that can really transform the political and economic status quo.

[NOTE FROM THE EDITORS]

Due to accessibility issues and time constraints, we have not been able to republish Smith's notes. We have left the references for the endnotes in the text for the sake of the reader. This essay—along with its original endnotes—was originally published in *The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn

FROM SERVITUDE TO SERVICE WORK

HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES IN THE RACIAL DIVISION OF PAID REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

Recent scholarship on African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women reveals the complex interaction of race and gender oppression in their lives. These studies expose the inadequacy of additive models that treat gender and race as separate and discrete systems of hierarchy (Collins 1986; King 1988; Brown 1989). In an additive model, white women are viewed solely in terms of gender, while women of color are thought to be “doubly” subordinated by the cumulative effects of gender plus race. Yet achieving a more adequate framework, one that captures the interlocking, interactive nature of these systems, has been extraordinarily difficult. Historically, race and gender have developed as separate topics of inquiry, each with its own literature and concepts. Thus features of social life considered central in understanding one system have been overlooked in analyses of the other.

One domain that has been explored extensively in analyses of gender but ignored in studies of race is social reproduction. The

term *social reproduction* is used by feminist scholars to refer to the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Reproductive labor includes activities such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties.

Marxist feminists place the gendered construction of reproductive labor at the center of women's oppression. They point out that this labor is performed disproportionately by women and is essential to the industrial economy. Yet because it takes place mostly outside the market, it is invisible, not recognized as real work. Men benefit directly and indirectly from this arrangement—directly in that they contribute less labor in the home while enjoying the services women provide as wives and mothers and indirectly in that, freed of domestic labor, they can concentrate their efforts in paid employment and attain primacy in that area. Thus the sexual division of reproductive labor in the home interacts with and reinforces sexual division in the labor market.* These analyses draw attention to the dialectics of production and reproduction and male privilege in both realms. When they represent gender as the sole basis for assigning reproductive labor, however, they imply that all women have the same relationship to it and that it is therefore a universal female experience.†

In the meantime, theories of racial hierarchy do not include any analysis of reproductive labor. Perhaps because, consciously or unconsciously, they are male centered, they focus exclusively on

* For various formulations, see Benston (1969), Secombe (1974), Barrett (1980), Fox (1980), and Sokoloff (1980).

† Recently, white feminists have begun to pay attention to scholarship by and about racial-ethnic women and to recognize racial stratification in the labor market and other public arenas. My point here is that they still assume that women's relationship to domestic labor is universal; thus they have not been concerned with explicating differences across race, ethnic, and class groups in women's relationship to that labor.

the paid labor market and especially on male-dominated areas of production.[‡] In the 1970s several writers seeking to explain the historic subordination of peoples of color pointed to dualism in the labor market—its division into distinct markets for white workers and for racial-ethnic workers—as a major vehicle for maintaining white domination (Blauner 1972; Barrera 1979).[§] According to these formulations, the labor system has been organized to ensure that racial-ethnic workers are relegated to a lower tier of low-wage, dead-end, marginal jobs; institutional barriers, including restrictions on legal and political rights, prevent their moving out of that tier and competing with Euro-American workers for better jobs. These theories draw attention to the material advantages whites gain from the racial division of labor. However, they either take for granted or ignore women's unpaid household labor and fail to consider whether this work might also be "racially divided."

In short, the racial division of reproductive labor has been a missing piece of the picture in both literatures. This piece, I would contend, is key to the distinct exploitation of women of color and is a source of both hierarchy and interdependence among white women and women of color. It is thus essential to the development of an integrated model of race and gender, one that treats them as interlocking, rather than additive, systems.

In this article I present a historical analysis of the simultaneous race and gender construction of reproductive labor in the United States, based on comparative study of women's work in the

‡ See, e.g., Reisler (1976), which, despite its title, is exclusively about male Mexican labor.

§ I use the term *racial-ethnic* to refer collectively to groups that have been socially constructed and constituted as racially as well as culturally distinct from European Americans and placed in separate legal statuses from "free whites" (c.f. Omi and Winant 1986). Historically, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans were so constructed. Similarly, I have capitalized the word *Black* throughout this article to signify the racial-ethnic construction of that category.

South, the Southwest, and the Far West. I argue that reproductive labor has divided along racial as well as gender lines and that the specific characteristics of the division have varied regionally and changed over time as capitalism has reorganized reproductive labor, shifting parts of it from the household to the market. In the first half of the century racial-ethnic women were employed as servants to perform reproductive labor in white households, relieving white middle-class women of onerous aspects of that work; in the second half of the century, with the expansion of commodified services (services turned into commercial products or activities), racial-ethnic women are disproportionately employed as service workers in institutional settings to carry out lower-level “public” reproductive labor, while cleaner white collar supervisory and lower professional positions are filled by white women.

I will examine the ways race and gender were constructed around the division of labor by sketching changes in the organization of reproductive labor since the early nineteenth century, presenting a case study of domestic service among African American women in the South, Mexican American women in the Southwest, and Japanese American women in California and Hawaii, and finally examining the shift to institutional service work, focusing on race and gender stratification in health care and the racial division of labor within the nursing labor force. Race and gender emerge as socially constructed, interlocking systems that shape the material conditions, identities, and consciousnesses of all women.

HISTORICAL CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF REPRODUCTION

The concept of reproductive labor originated in Karl Marx’s remark that every system of production involves both the production of the necessities of life and the reproduction of the tools

and labor power necessary for production (Marx and Engels 1969, 31). Recent elaborations of the concept grow out of Engels's dictum that the "determining force in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life." This has, he noted, "a two-fold character, on the one hand the production of subsistence and on the other the production of human beings themselves" (Engels 1972, 71). Although often equated with domestic labor or defined narrowly as referring to the renewal of labor power, the term *social reproduction* has come to be more broadly conceived, particularly by social historians, to refer to the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical, beings (Ryan 1981, 15). Thus, it involves mental, emotional, and manual labor (Brenner and Laslett 1986, 117). This labor can be organized in myriad ways—in and out of the household, as paid or unpaid work, creating exchange value or only use value—and these ways are not mutually exclusive. An example is the preparation of food, which can be done by a family member as unwaged work in the household, by a servant as waged work in the household, or by a short-order cook in a fast-food restaurant as waged work that generates profit for the employer. These forms exist contemporaneously.

Prior to industrialization, however, both production and reproduction were organized almost exclusively at the household level. Women were responsible for most of what might be designated as reproduction, but they were simultaneously engaged in the production of foodstuffs, clothing, shoes, candles, soap, and other goods consumed by the household. With industrialization, production of these basic goods gradually was taken over by capitalist industry. Reproduction, however, remained largely the responsibility of individual households. The ideological separation between men's "productive" labor and women's non-market-based activity that had evolved at the end of the eighteenth century was elaborated in the early decades of the nineteenth. An idealized division of labor arose in which men's work was to

follow production outside the home, while women's work was to remain centered in the household (Boydston 1990, esp. 46-48). Household work continued to include the production of many goods consumed by members (Smuts 1959, 11-13; Kessler-Harris 1981), but as an expanding range of outside-manufactured goods became available, household work became increasingly focused on reproduction.* This idealized division of labor was largely illusory for working-class households, including immigrant and racial-ethnic families, in which men seldom earned a family wage; in these households women and children were forced into income-earning activities in and out of the home (Kessler-Harris 1982).

In the second half of the twentieth century, with goods production almost completely incorporated into the market, reproduction has become the next major target for commodification. Aside from the tendency of capital to expand into new areas for profit making, the very conditions of life brought about by large-scale commodity production have increased the need for commercial services. As household members spend more of their waking hours employed outside the home, they have less time and inclination to provide for one another's social and emotional needs. With the growth of a more geographically mobile and urbanized society, individuals and households have become increasingly cut off from larger kinship circles, neighbors, and traditional communities. Thus, as Harry Braverman notes, "The population no longer relies upon social organization in the form of family, friends, neighbors, community, elders, children, but with few exceptions must go to the market and only to the market, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but also for recreation, amusement, security, for the care of the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped. In time not only the material and service needs

* Capitalism, however, changed the nature of reproductive labor, which became more and more devoted to consumption activities, i.e., using wages to acquire necessities in the market and then processing these commodities to make them usable (see Weinbaum and Bridges 1976; and Luxton 1980).

but even the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market" (Braverman 1974, 276). Conditions of capitalist urbanism also have enlarged the population of those requiring daily care and support: elderly and very young people, mentally and physically disabled people, criminals, and other people incapable of fending for themselves. Because the care of such dependents becomes difficult for the "stripped-down" nuclear family or the atomized community to bear, more of it becomes relegated to institutions outside the family.[†]

The final phase in this process is what Braverman calls the "product cycle," which "invents new products and services, some of which become indispensable as the conditions of modern life change and destroy alternatives" (Braverman 1974, 281). In many areas (e.g., health care), we no longer have choices outside the market. New services and products also alter the definition of an acceptable standard of living. Dependence on the market is further reinforced by what happened earlier with goods production, namely, an "atrophy of competence," so that individuals no longer know how to do what they formerly did for themselves.

As a result of these tendencies, an increasing range of services has been removed wholly or partially from the household and converted into paid services yielding profits. Today, activities such as preparing and serving food (in restaurants and fast-food establishments), caring for handicapped and elderly people (in nursing homes), caring for children (in child-care centers), and providing emotional support, amusement, and companionship (in counseling offices, recreation centers, and health clubs) have become part of the cash nexus. In addition, whether impelled by a need to maintain social control or in response to pressure exerted by worker and community organizations, the state has stepped in to assume minimal responsibility for some reproductive tasks, such

[†] This is not to deny that family members, especially women, still provide the bulk of care of dependents, but to point out that there has been a marked increase in institutionalized care in the second half of the twentieth century.

as child protection and welfare programs.' Whether supplied by corporations or the state, these services are labor-intensive. Thus, a large army of low-wage workers, mostly women and disproportionately women of color, must be recruited to supply the labor.

Still, despite vastly expanded commodification and institutionalization, much reproduction remains organized at the household level. Sometimes an activity is too labor-intensive to be very profitable. Sometimes households or individuals in them have resisted commodification. The limited commodification of child care, for example, involves both elements. The extent of commercialization in different areas of life is uneven, and the variation in its extent is the outcome of political and economic struggles (Brenner and Laslett 1986, 121; Laslett and Brenner 1989, 384). What is consistent across forms, whether commodified or not, is that reproductive labor is constructed as "female." The gendered organization of reproduction is widely recognized. Less obvious, but equally characteristic, is its racial construction: historically, racial-ethnic women have been assigned a distinct place in the organization of reproductive labor.

Elsewhere I have talked about the reproductive labor racial-ethnic women have carried out for their own families; this labor was intensified as the women struggled to maintain family life and indigenous cultures in the face of cultural assaults, ghettoization, and a labor system that relegated men and women to low-wage, seasonal, and hazardous employment (Glenn 1985; 1986, 86-108; Dill 1988). Here I want to talk about two forms of waged reproductive work that racial-ethnic women have performed

* For a discussion of varying views on the relative importance of control versus agency in shaping state welfare policy, see Gordon (1990). Piven and Cloward note that programs have been created only when poor people have mobilized and are intended to defuse pressure for more radical change (1971, 66). In their (Piven and Cloward 1979), they document the role of working-class struggles to win concessions from the state. For a feminist social control perspective, see Abramovitz (1988).

disproportionately: domestic service in private households and institutional service work.

DOMESTIC SERVICE AS THE RACIAL DIVISION OF REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

Both the demand for household help and the number of women employed as servants expanded rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Chaplin 1978). This expansion paralleled the rise of industrial capital and the elaboration of middle-class women's reproductive responsibilities. Rising standards of cleanliness, larger and more ornately furnished homes, the sentimentalization of the home as a "haven in a heartless world" (Lasch 1977), and the new emphasis on childhood and the mother's role in nurturing children all served to enlarge middle-class women's responsibilities for reproduction at a time when technology had done little to reduce the sheer physical drudgery of housework.[†]

By all accounts middle-class women did not challenge the gender-based division of labor or the enlargement of their reproductive responsibilities. Indeed, middle-class women—as readers and writers of literature; as members and leaders of clubs, charitable organizations, associations, reform movements, and religious revivals; and as supporters of the cause of abolition—helped to elaborate the domestic code (Brenner and Laslett 1986).[‡] Feminists seeking an expanded public role for women argued that the same nurturant and moral qualities that made women centers of the home should be brought to bear in public service. In the domestic sphere, instead of questioning the inequitable gender division of labor, they sought to slough off the more burdensome tasks onto more oppressed groups of women.[§]

[†] These developments are discussed in Degler (1980), Strasser (1982), Cowan (1983), and Dudden (1983, esp. 240-42).

[‡] See also Blair (1980); Epstein (1981); Ryan (1981); Dudden (1983); and Brenner and Laslett (1986).

[§] See, e.g., Kaplan (1987).

Phyllis Palmer observes that at least through the first half of the twentieth century, “most white middle class women could hire another woman—a recent immigrant, a working class woman, a woman of color,

or all three—to perform much of the hard labor of household tasks” (Palmer 1987, 182-83). Domestic workers were employed to clean house, launder and iron clothes, scrub floors, and care for infants and children. They relieved their mistresses of the heavier and dirtier domestic chores.* White middle-class women were thereby freed for supervisory tasks and for cultural, leisure, and volunteer activity or, more rarely during this period, for a career.†

Palmer suggests that the use of domestic servants also helped resolve certain contradictions created by the domestic code. She notes that the early twentieth-century housewife confronted inconsistent expectations of middleclass womanhood: domesticity and “feminine virtue.” Domesticity—defined as creating a warm, clean, and attractive home for husband and children—required hard physical labor and meant contending with dirt. The virtuous woman, however, was defined in terms of spirituality, refinement, and the denial of the physical body. Additionally, in the 1920s and 1930s there emerged a new ideal of the modern wife as an intelligent and attractive companion. If the heavy parts of household work could be transferred to paid help, the middle-class housewife could fulfill her domestic duties, yet distance herself from the physical labor and dirt and also have time for personal development (Palmer 1990, 127-51).

* Phyllis Palmer, in her found evidence that mistresses and servants agreed on what were the least desirable tasks—washing clothes, washing dishes, and taking care of children on evenings and weekends—and that domestics were more likely to perform the least desirable tasks (1990, 70).

† It may be worth mentioning the importance of unpaid cultural and charitable activities in perpetuating middle-class privilege and power. Middle-class reformers often aimed to mold the poor in ways that mirrored middle-class values but without actually altering their subordinate position. See, e.g., Sanchez (1990) for discussion of efforts of Anglo reformers to train Chicanas in domestic skills.

Who was to perform the “dirty work” varied by region. In the Northeast, European immigrant women, particularly those who were Irish and German, constituted the majority of domestic servants from the mid-nineteenth century to World War I (Katzman 1978, 65-70). In regions where there was a large concentration of people of color, subordinate-race women formed a more or less permanent servant stratum. Despite differences in the composition of the populations and the mix of industries in the regions, there were important similarities in the situation of Mexicans in the Southwest, African Americans in the South, and Japanese people in northern California and Hawaii. Each of these groups was placed in a separate legal category from whites, excluded from rights and protections accorded full citizens. This severely limited their ability to organize, compete for jobs, and acquire capital (Glenn 1985). The racial division of private reproductive work mirrored this racial dualism in the legal, political, and economic systems.

In the South, African American women constituted the main and almost exclusive servant caste. Except in times of extreme economic crisis, whites and Blacks did not compete for domestic jobs. Until the First World War 90 percent of all nonagriculturally employed Black women in the South were employed as domestics. Even at the national level, servants and laundresses accounted for close to half (48.4 percent) of non-agriculturally employed Black women in 1930.[‡]

In the Southwest, especially in the states with the highest proportions of Mexicans in the population—Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico—Chicanas were disproportionately concentrated in domestic service.[§] In El Paso nearly half of all Chicanas in the

[‡] U.S. Bureau of the Census 1933, chap. 3, “Color and Nativity of Gainful Workers,” tables 2, 4, 6. For discussion of the concentration of African American women in domestic service, see Glenn (1985).

[§] I use the terms and to refer to both native-born and immigrant Mexican people/women in the United States.

labor market were employed as servants or laundresses in the early decades of the century (Garcia 1981, 76). In Denver, according to Sarah Deutsch, perhaps half of all households had at least one female member employed as a domestic at some time, and if a woman became a widow, she was almost certain to take in laundry (Deutsch 1987a, 147). Nationally, 39.1 percent of non-agriculturally employed Chicanas were servants or laundresses in 1930.*

In the Far West—especially in California and Hawaii, with their large populations of Asian immigrants—an unfavorable sex ratio made female labor scarce in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast to the rest of the nation, the majority of domestic servants in California and Hawaii were men: in California until 1880 (Katzman 1978, 55) and in Hawaii as late as 1920 (Lind 1951, table 1). The men were Asian-Chinese and later Japanese. Chinese houseboys and cooks were familiar figures in late nineteenth-century San Francisco; so too were Japanese male retainers in early twentieth-century Honolulu. After 1907 Japanese women began to immigrate in substantial numbers, and they inherited the mantle of service in both California and Hawaii. In the pre-World War II years, close to half of all immigrant and native-born Japanese American women in the San Francisco Bay area and in Honolulu were employed as servants or laundresses (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1932, table 8; Glenn 1986, 76-79). Nationally, excluding Hawaii, 25.4 percent of nonagricultural Japanese American women workers were listed as servants in 1930.†

In areas where racial dualism prevailed, being served by members of the subordinate group was a perquisite of membership in the dominant group. According to Elizabeth Rae Tyson, an Anglo woman who grew up in El Paso in the early years of the

* U.S. Bureau of the Census 1933.

† Ibid.

century, “almost every Anglo-American family had at least one, sometimes two or three servants: a maid and laundress, and perhaps a nursemaid or yardman. The maid came in after breakfast and cleaned up the breakfast dishes, and very likely last night’s supper dishes as well; did the routine cleaning, washing and ironing, and after the family dinner in the middle of the day, washed dishes again, and then went home to perform similar services in her own home” (Garcia 1980, 327). In southwest cities, Mexican American girls were trained at an early age to do domestic work and girls as young as nine or ten were hired to clean house.[‡]

In Hawaii, where the major social division was between the haole (Caucasian) planter class and the largely Asian plantation worker class, haole residents were required to employ one or more Chinese or Japanese servants to demonstrate their status and their social distance from those less privileged. Andrew Lind notes that “the literature on Hawaii, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, is full of references to the open-handed hospitality of Island residents, dispensed by the ever present maids and houseboys” (Lind 1951, 73). A public school teacher who arrived in Honolulu in 1925 was placed in a teacher’s cottage with four other mainland teachers. She discovered a maid had already been hired by the principal: “A maid! None of us had ever had a maid. We were all used to doing our own work. Furthermore, we were all in debt and did not feel that we wanted to spend even four dollars a month on a maid. Our principal was quite insistent. Everyone on the plantation had a maid. It was, therefore, the thing to do” (Lind 1951, 76).

In the South, virtually every middle-class housewife employed at least one African American woman to do cleaning and child care in her home. Southern household workers told one writer that in the old days, “if you worked for a family, your daughter

[‡] For personal accounts of Chicano children being inducted into domestic service, see (1987a) and interview of Josephine Turietta in Elsasser, MacKenzie, and Tixier y Vigil (1980, 28-35).

was expected to, too” (Tucker 1988, 98). Daughters of Black domestics were sometimes inducted as children into service to baby-sit, wash diapers, and help clean (Clark-Lewis 1987, 200-201).^{*} White-skin privilege transcended class lines, and it was not uncommon for working-class whites to hire Black women for housework (Anderson and Bowman 1953). In the 1930s white women tobacco workers in Durham, North Carolina, could mitigate the effects of the “double day”—household labor on top of paid labor—by employing Black women to work in their homes for about one-third of their own wages (Janiewski 1983, 93). Black women tobacco workers were too poorly paid to have this option and had to rely on the help of overworked husbands, older children, Black women too old to be employed, neighbors, or kin.

Where more than one group was available for service, a differentiated hierarchy of race, color, and culture emerged. White and racial-ethnic domestics were hired for different tasks. In her study of women workers in Atlanta, New Orleans, and San Antonio during the 1920s and 1930s, Julia Kirk Blackwelder reported that “anglo women in the employ of private households were nearly always reported as housekeepers, while Blacks and Chicanas were reported as laundresses, cooks or servants” (Blackwelder 1978, 349).[†]

In the Southwest, where Anglos considered Mexican or “Spanish” culture inferior, Anglos displayed considerable ambivalence about employing Mexicans for child care. Although a modern-day example, this statement by an El Paso businessman illustrates the contradictions in Anglo attitudes. The man told an inter-

^{*} See also life history accounts of Black domestics, such as that of Bolden (1976) and of Anna Mae Dickson by Wendy Wattiss (Wattiss 1984).

[†] Blackwelder also found that domestics themselves were attuned to the racial-ethnic hierarchy among them. When advertising for jobs, women who did not identify themselves as Black overwhelmingly requested “housekeeping” or “governess” positions, whereas Blacks advertised for “cooking,” “laundering,” or just plain “domestic work.”

viewer that he and his wife were putting off parenthood because “the major dilemma would be what to do with the child. We don’t really like the idea of leaving the baby at home with a maid ... for the simple reason if the maid is Mexican, the child may assume that the other person is its mother. Nothing wrong with Mexicans, they’d just assume that this other person is its mother. There have been all sorts of cases where the infants learned Spanish before they learned English. There’ve been incidents of the Mexican maid stealing the child and taking it over to Mexico and selling it” (Rufz 1987b, 71).

In border towns, the Mexican group was further stratified by English-speaking ability, place of nativity, and immigrant status, with non-English-speaking women residing south of the border occupying the lowest rung. In Laredo and El Paso, Mexican American factory operatives often employed Mexican women who crossed the border daily or weekly to do domestic work for a fraction of a U.S. operative’s wages (Hield 1984, 95; Ruiz 1987a, 64).

The race and gender construction of domestic service

Despite their preference for European immigrant domestics, employers could not easily retain their services. Most European immigrant women left service upon marriage, and their daughters moved into the expanding manufacturing, clerical, and sales occupations during the 1910s and twenties.[‡] With the flow of immigration slowed to a trickle during World War I, there were few new recruits from Europe. In the 1920s, domestic service became increasingly the specialty of minority-race women (Palmer 1990, 12). Women of color were advantageous employees in one re-

[‡] This is not to say that daughters of European immigrants experienced great social mobility and soon attained affluence. The nondomestic jobs they took were usually low paying and the conditions of work often deplorable. Nonetheless, white native-born and immigrant women clearly preferred the relative freedom of industrial, office, or shop employment to the constraints of domestic service (see Katzman 1978, 71-72).

spect: they could be compelled more easily to remain in service. There is considerable evidence that middle-class whites acted to ensure the domestic labor supply by tracking racial-ethnic women into domestic service and blocking their entry into other fields. Urban school systems in the Southwest tracked Chicana students into homemaking courses designed to prepare them for domestic service. The El Paso school board established a segregated school system in the 1880s that remained in place for the next thirty years; education for Mexican children emphasized manual and domestic skills that would prepare them to work at an early age. In 1909 the Women's Civic Improvement League, an Anglo organization, advocated domestic training for older Mexican girls. Their rationale is explained by Mario Garcia: "According to the league the housegirls for the entire city came from the Mexican settlement and if they could be taught housekeeping, cooking and sewing, every American family would benefit. The Mexican girls would likewise profit since their services would improve and hence be in greater demand" (Garcia 1981, 113).

The education of Chicanas in the Denver school system was similarly directed toward preparing students for domestic service and handicrafts. Sarah Deutsch found that Anglo women there persisted in viewing Chicanas and other "inferior-race" women as dependent, slovenly, and ignorant. Thus, they argued, training Mexican girls for domestic service not only would solve "one phase of women's work we seem to be incapable of handling" but it would simultaneously help raise the (Mexican) community by improving women's standard of living, elevating their morals, and facilitating Americanization (Deutsch 1987b, 736). One Anglo writer, in an article published in 1917 titled "Problems and Progress among Mexicans in Our Own Southwest," claimed, "When trained there is no better servant than the gentle, quiet Mexicana girl" (Romero 1988a, 16).

In Hawaii, with its plantation economy, Japanese and Chinese women were coerced into service for their husbands' or fathers' employers. According to Lind, prior to World War II:

It has been a usual practice for a department head or a member of the managerial staff of the plantation to indicate to members of his work group that his household is in need of domestic help and to expect them to provide a wife or daughter to fill the need. Under the conditions which have prevailed in the past, the worker has felt obligated to make a member of his own family available for such service, if required, since his own position and advancement depend upon keeping the goodwill of his boss. Not infrequently, girls have been prevented from pursuing a high school or college education because someone on the supervisory staff has needed a servant and it has seemed inadvisable for the family to disregard the claim. [Lind 1951, 77]

Economic coercion also could take bureaucratic forms, especially for women in desperate straits. During the Depression, local officials of the federal Works Project Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA), programs set up by the Roosevelt administration to help the unemployed find work, tried to direct Chicanas and Blacks to domestic service jobs exclusively (Blackwelder 1984, 120-22; Deutsch 1987a, 182-83). In Colorado, local officials of the WPA and NYA advocated household training projects for Chicanas. George Bickel, assistant state director of the WPA for Colorado, wrote: "The average Spanish-American girl on the NY A program looks forward to little save a life devoted to motherhood often under the most miserable circumstances" (Deutsch 1987a, 183). Given such an outlook, it made sense to provide training in domestic skills.

Young Chicanas disliked domestic service so much that slots in the programs went begging. Older women, especially single

mothers struggling to support their families, could not afford to refuse what was offered. The cruel dilemma that such women faced was poignantly expressed in one woman's letter to President Roosevelt:

My name is Lula Gordon. I am a Negro woman. I am on the relief. I have three children. I have no husband and no job. I have worked hard ever since I was old enough. I am willing to do any kind of work because I have to support myself and my children. I was under the impression that the government or the W.P.A. would give the Physical [*sic*] fit relief clients work. I have been praying for that time to come. A lady, Elizabeth Ramsie, almost in my condition, told me she was going to try to get some work. I went with her. We went to the Court House here in San Antonio, we talked to a Mrs. Beckmono Mrs. Beckmon told me to phone a Mrs. Coyle because she wanted some one to clean house and cook for (5) five dollars a week. Mrs. Beckmon said if I did not take the job in the Private home I would be cut off from everything all together. I told her I was afraid to accept the job in the private home because I have registered for a government job and when it opens up I want to take it. She said that she was taking people off of the relief and I have to take the job in the private home or none...I need work and I will do anything the government gives me to do...Will you please give me some work. [Blackwelder 1984, 68-69]

Japanese American women were similarly compelled to accept domestic service jobs when they left the internment camps in which they were imprisoned during World War II. To leave the camps they had to have a job and a residence, and many women were forced to take positions as live-in servants in various parts of the country. When women from the San Francisco Bay area returned there after the camps were closed, agencies set up to assist the returnees directed them to domestic service jobs. Because

they had lost their homes and possessions and had no savings, returnees had to take whatever jobs were offered them. Some became live-in servants to secure housing, which was in short supply after the war. In many cases domestic employment became a lifelong career (Glenn 1986).

In Hawaii the Japanese were not interned, but there nonetheless developed a “maid shortage” as war-related employment expanded. Accustomed to cheap and abundant household help, haole employers became increasingly agitated about being deprived of the services of their “mamasans.” The suspicion that many able-bodied former maids were staying at home idle because their husbands or fathers had lucrative defense jobs was taken seriously enough to prompt an investigation by a university researcher.^{*}

Housewives told their nisei maids it was the maids’ patriotic duty to remain on the job. A student working as a live-in domestic during the war was dumbfounded by her mistress’s response when she notified her she was leaving to take a room in the dormitory at the university. Her cultured and educated mistress, whom the student had heretofore admired, exclaimed with annoyance: “I think especially in war time, the University should close down the dormitory.” Although she didn’t say it in words, I sensed the implication that she believed all the (Japanese) girls should be placed in different homes, making it easier for the haole woman.”[†] The student noted with some bitterness that although her employer told her that working as a maid was the way for her to do “your bit for the war effort,” she and other haole women did not, in turn, consider giving up the “conveniences and luxuries of pre-war Hawaii” as their bit for the war.[‡]

^{*} Document Ma 24, Romanzo Adams Social Research Laboratory papers. I used these records when they were lodged in the sociology department; they are currently being cataloged by the university archives and a finding aid is in process.

[†] Ibid., document Ma 15, 5.

[‡] Ibid.

The dominant group ideology in all these cases was that women of color—African American women, Chicanas, and Japanese American women—were particularly suited for service. These racial justifications ranged from the argument that Black and Mexican women were incapable of governing their own lives and thus were dependent on whites—making white employment of them an act of benevolence—to the argument that Asian servants were naturally quiet, subordinate, and accustomed to a lower standard of living. Whatever the specific content of the racial characterizations, it defined the proper place of these groups as in service: they belonged there, just as it was the dominant group's place to be served.

David Katzman notes that “ethnic stereotyping was the stock in trade of all employers of servants, and it is difficult at times to figure out whether blacks and immigrants were held in contempt because they were servants or whether urban servants were denigrated because most of the servants were blacks and immigrants” (Katzman 1978, 221). Even though racial stereotypes undoubtedly preceded their entry into domestic work, it is also the case that domestics were forced to enact the role of the inferior. Judith Rollins and Mary Romero describe a variety of rituals that affirmed the subordination and dependence of the domestic; for example, employers addressed household workers by their first names and required them to enter by the back door, eat in the kitchen, and wear uniforms. Domestics understood they were not to initiate conversation but were to remain standing or visibly engaged in work whenever the employer was in the room. They also had to accept with gratitude “gifts” of discarded clothing and leftover food (Rollins 1985, chap. 5; Romero 1987).

For their part, racial-ethnic women were acutely aware that they were trapped in domestic service by racism and not by lack of skills or intelligence. In their study of Black life in prewar Chicago, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton found that education did

not provide African Americans with an entree into white collar work. They noted, "Colored girls are often bitter in their comments about a society which condemns them to the 'white folks' kitchen'" (Drake and Cayton 1962, 246). Thirty-five years later, Anna May Madison minced no words when she declared to anthropologist John Gwaltney: "Now, I don't do nothing for white women or men that they couldn't do for themselves. They don't do anything I couldn't learn to do every bit as well as they do it. But, you see, that goes right back to the life that you have to live. If that was the life I had been raised up in, I could be President or any other thing I got a chance to be" (Gwaltney 1980, 173).

Chicana domestics interviewed by Mary Romero in Colorado seemed at one level to accept the dominant culture's evaluation of their capabilities. Several said their options were limited by lack of education and training. However, they also realized they were restricted just because they were Mexican. Sixty-eight-year-old Mrs. Portillo told Romero: "There was a lot of discrimination, and Spanish people got just regular housework or laundry work. There was so much discrimination that Spanish people couldn't get jobs outside of washing dishes—things like that" (Romero 1988b, 86).

Similarly, many Japanese domestics reported that their choices were constrained because of language difficulties and lack of education, but they, too, recognized that color was decisive. Some nisei domestics had taken typing and business courses and some had college degrees, yet they had to settle for "school girl" jobs after completing their schooling. Mrs. Morita, who grew up in San Francisco and was graduated from high school in the 1930s, bluntly summarized her options: "In those days there was no two ways about it. If you were Japanese, you either worked in an art store ('oriental curios' shop) where they sell those little junks, or you worked as a domestic There was no Japanese girl working in an American firm" (Glenn 1986, 122).

Hanna Nelson, another of Gwaltney's informants, took the analysis one step further; she recognized the coercion that kept African American women in domestic service. She saw this arrangement as one that allowed white women to exploit Black women economically and emotionally and exposed Black women to sexual assaults by white men, often with white women's complicity. She says, "I am a woman sixty-one years old and I was born into this world with some talent. But I have done the work that my grandmother's mother did. It is not through any failing of mine that this is so. The whites took my mother's milk by force, and I have lived to hear a human creature of my sex try to force me by threat of hunger to give my milk to an able man. I have grown to womanhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear" (Gwaltney 1980, 7).

Race and gender consciousness

Hanna Nelson displays a consciousness of the politics of race and gender not found among white employers. Employers' and employees' fundamentally different positions within the division of reproductive labor gave them different interests and perspectives. Phyllis Palmer describes the problems the YWCA and other reform groups encountered when they attempted to establish voluntary standards and working hours for live-in domestics in the 1930s. White housewives invariably argued against any "rigid" limitation of hours; they insisted on provisions for emergencies that would override any hour limits. Housewives saw their own responsibilities as limitless, and apparently felt there was no justification for boundaries on domestics' responsibilities. They did not acknowledge the fundamental difference in their positions: they themselves gained status and privileges from their relationships with their husbands—relationships that depended on the performance of wifely duties. They expected domestics to devote long hours and hard work to help them succeed as wives, without, however, commensurate privileges and status. To chal-

lenge the inequitable gender division of labor was too difficult and threatening, so white housewives pushed the dilemma onto other women, holding them to the same high standards by which they themselves were imprisoned (Kaplan 1987; Palmer 1990).

Some domestic workers were highly conscious of their mistresses' subordination to their husbands and condemned their unwillingness to challenge their husbands' authority. Mabel Johns, a sixty-four-year-old widow, told Gwaltney:

I work for a woman who has a good husband; the devil is good to her, anyway. Now that woman could be a good person if she didn't think she could just do everything and have everything. In this world whatsoever you get you will pay for. Now she is a grown woman, but she won't know that simple thing. I don't think there's anything wrong with her mind, but she is greedy and she don't believe in admitting that she is greedy. Now you may say what you willormay [*sic*] about people being good to you, but there just ain' a living soul in this world that thinks more of you than you do of yourself She's a grown woman, but she have to keep accounts and her husband tells her whether or not he will let her do thus-and-so or buy this or that. [Gwaltney 1980, 167]

Black domestics are also conscious that a white woman's status comes from her relationship to a white man, that she gains privileges from the relationship that blinds her to her own oppression, and that she therefore willingly participates in and gains advantages from the oppression of racial-ethnic women. Nancy White puts the matter powerfully when she says,

My mother used to say that the black woman is the white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now, she said that to say this: we do the heavy work and get beat whether we do it well or not. But the white woman is closer to the

master and he pats them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain' gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person. Now, if I was to tell a white woman that, the first thing she would do is to call you a nigger and then she'd be real nice to her husband so he would come out here and beat you for telling his wife the truth. [Gwaltney 1980, 148]

Rather than challenge the inequity in the relationship with their husbands, white women pushed the burden onto women with even less power. They could justify this only by denying the domestic worker's womanhood, by ignoring the employee's family ties and responsibilities. Susan Tucker found that southern white women talked about their servants with affection and expressed gratitude that they shared work with the servant that they would otherwise have to do alone. Yet the sense of commonality based on gender that the women expressed turned out to be one-way. Domestic workers knew that employers did not want to know much about their home situations (Kaplan 1987, 96; Tucker 1988). Mostly, the employers did not want domestics' personal needs to interfere with serving them. One domestic wrote that her employer berated her when she asked for a few hours off to pay her bills and take care of pressing business (Palmer 1990, 74). Of relations between white mistresses and Black domestics in the period from 1870 to 1920, Katzman says that in extreme cases "even the shared roles of motherhood could be denied." A Black child nurse reported in 1912 that she worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day caring for her mistress's four children. Describing her existence as a "treadmill life," she reported that she was allowed to go home "only once in every two weeks, every other Sunday afternoon—even then I'm not permitted to stay all night. I see my own children only when they happen to see me on the streets when I am out with the children [of her mistress], or when my children come to the yard to see me, which isn't often, because

my white folks don't like to see their servants' children hanging around their premises."

While this case may be extreme, Tucker reports, on the basis of extensive interviews with southern African American domestics, that even among live-out workers in the 1960s,

White women were also not noted for asking about childcare arrangements. All whites, said one black woman, "assume you have a mother, or an older daughter to keep your child, so it's all right to leave your kids." Stories of white employers not believing the children of domestics were sick, but hearing this as an excuse not to work, were also common. Stories, too, of white women who did not inquire of a domestic's family—even when that domestic went on extended trips with the family—were not uncommon. And work on Christmas morning and other holidays for black mothers was not considered by white employers as unfair. Indeed, work on these days was seen as particularly important to the job. [Tucker 1988, 99]

The irony is, of course, that domestics saw their responsibilities as mothers as the central core of their identity. The Japanese American women I interviewed, the Chicana day workers Romero interviewed, and the African American domestics Bonnie Thornton Dill interviewed all emphasized the primacy of their role as mothers (Dill 1980; Glenn 1986; Romero 1988b). As a Japanese immigrant single parent expressed it, "My children come first. I'm working to upgrade my children." Another domestic, Mrs. Hiraoka, confided she hated household work but would keep working until her daughter graduated from optometry school.[†] Romero's day workers arranged their work hours to fit around their children's school hours so that they could be there when

* "More Slavery at the South: A Negro Nurse," from the (1912), in Katzman and Tuttle (1982, 176-85, 179).

† From an interview conducted by the author in the San Francisco Bay area in 1977.

needed. For domestics, then, working had meaning precisely because it enabled them to provide for their children.

Perhaps the most universal theme in domestic workers' statements is that they are working so their own daughters will not have to go into domestic service and confront the same dilemmas of leaving their babies to work. A Japanese American domestic noted, "I tell my daughters all the time, 'As long as you get a steady job, stay in school. I want you to get a good job, not like me.' That's what I always tell my daughters: make sure you're not stuck."*

In a similar vein, Pearl Runner told Dill, "My main goal was I didn't want them to follow in my footsteps as far as working" (Dill 1980, 109). Domestic workers wanted to protect their daughters from both the hardships and the dangers that working in white homes posed. A Black domestic told Drake and Cayton of her hopes for her daughters: "I hope they may be able to escape a life as a domestic worker, for I know too well the things that make a girl desperate on these jobs" (Drake and Cayton 1962, 246).

When they succeed in helping their children do better than they themselves did, domestics may consider that the hardships were worthwhile. Looking back, Mrs. Runner is able to say, "I really feel that with all the struggling that I went through, I feel happy and proud that I was able to keep helping my children, that they listened and that they all went to high school. So when I look back, I really feel proud, even though at times the work was very hard and I came home very tired. But now, I feel proud about it. They all got their education" (Dill 1980, 113). Domestics thus have to grapple with yet another contradiction. They must confront, acknowledge, and convey the undesirable nature of the work they do to their children, as an object lesson and an admo-

* Ibid.

nition, and at the same time maintain their children's respect and their own sense of personal worth and dignity (Dill 1980, 110). When they successfully manage that contradiction, they refute their white employers' belief that "you are your work" (Gwaltney 1980, 174).

THE RACIAL DIVISION OF PUBLIC REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

As noted earlier, the increasing commodification of social reproduction since World War II has led to a dramatic growth in employment by women in such areas as food preparation and service, health care services, child care, and recreational services. The division of labor in public settings mirrors the division of labor in the household. Racial-ethnic women are employed to do the heavy, dirty, "back-room" chores of cooking and serving food in restaurants and cafeterias, cleaning rooms in hotels and office buildings, and caring for the elderly and ill in hospitals and nursing homes, including cleaning rooms, making beds, changing bed pans, and preparing food. In these same settings white women are disproportionately employed as lower-level professionals (e.g., nurses and social workers), technicians, and administrative support workers to carry out the more skilled and supervisory tasks.

The U.S. Census category of "service occupations except private household and protective services" roughly approximates what I mean by "institutional service work." It includes food preparation and service, health care service, cleaning and building services, and personal services.[†] In the United States as a whole,

[†] The U.S. Labor Department and the U.S. Bureau of the Census divide service occupations into three major categories: "private household," "protective service," and "service occupations except private household and protective services." In this discussion, "service work" refers only to the latter. I omit private household workers, who have been discussed previously, and protective service workers, who include firefighters and police: these jobs, in addition to being male dominated and relatively well paid, carry some degree of authority, including the right to use force.

Black and Spanish-origin women are overrepresented in this set of occupations; in 1980 they made up 13.7 percent of all workers in the field, nearly double their proportion (7.0 percent) in the work force. White women (some of whom were of Spanish origin) were also overrepresented, but not to the same extent, making up 50.1 percent of all "service" workers, compared with their 36 percent share in the overall work force. (Black and Spanish-origin men made up 9.6 percent, and white men, who were 50 percent of the work force, made up the remaining 27.5 percent.)^{*}

Because white women constitute the majority, institutional service work may not at first glance appear to be racialized. However, if we look more closely at the composition of specific jobs within the larger category, we find clear patterns of racial specialization. White women are preferred in positions requiring physical and social contact with the public, that is, waiters/waitresses, transportation attendants, hairdressers/cosmetologists, and dental assistants, while racial-ethnic women are preferred in dirty back-room jobs as maids, janitors/cleaners, kitchen workers, and nurse's aides.[†]

As in the case of domestic service, who does what varies regionally, following racial-ethnic caste lines in local economies. Racialization is clearest in local economies where a subordinate race/ethnic group is sizable enough to fill a substantial portion of jobs. In southern cities, Black women are twice as likely to be employed in service occupations as white women. For example, in Atlanta in 1980, 20.8 percent of African American women were so employed, compared with 10.4 percent of white women. While they were less than one-quarter (23.9 percent) of all women workers, they were nearly two-fifths (38.3 percent) of women service workers. In Memphis, 25.9 percent of African

^{*} Computed from U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984), chap. D, "Detailed Population Characteristics," pt. 1; "United States Summary," table 278: "Detailed Occupation of Employed Persons by Sex, Race and Spanish Origin, 1980.28."

[†] Ibid.

American women compared with 10.2 percent of white women were in services; though they made up only a third (34.5 percent) of the female work force, African American women were nearly three-fifths (57.2 percent) of women employed in this field. In southwestern cities Spanish-origin women specialize in service work. In San Antonio, 21.9 percent of Spanish-origin women were so employed, compared with 11.6 percent of non-Spanish-origin white women; in that city half (49.8 percent) of all women service workers were Spanish-origin, while Anglos, who made up two-thirds (64.0 percent) of the female work force, were a little over a third (36.4 percent) of those in the service category. In El Paso, 16.9 percent of Spanish-origin women were service workers compared with 10.8 percent of Anglo women, and they made up two-thirds (66.1 percent) of those in service. Finally, in Honolulu, Asian and Pacific Islanders constituted 68.6 percent of the female work force, but 74.8 percent of those were in service jobs. Overall, these jobs employed 21.6 percent of all Asian and Pacific Islander women, compared with 13.7 percent of white non-Spanish-origin women.[‡]

[‡] Figures computed from table 279 in each of the state chapters of the following: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984), chap. D, "Detailed Population Characteristics," pt. 6: "California"; pt. 12: "Georgia"; pt. 13: "Hawaii"; pt. 15: "Illinois"; pt. 44: "Tennessee"; and pt. 45: "Texas." The figures for Anglos in the Southwest are estimates, based on the assumption that most "Spanish-origin" people are Mexican, and that Mexicans, when given a racial designation, are counted as whites. Specifically, the excess left after the "total" is subtracted from the "sum" of white, Black, American Indian/Eskimo/Aleut Asian and Pacific Islander, and "Spanish-origin" is subtracted from the white figure. The remainder is counted as "Anglo." Because of the way "Spanish-origin" crosscuts race (Spanish-origin individuals can be counted as white, Black, or any other race), I did not attempt to compute figures for Latinos or Anglos in cities where Spanish-origin individuals are likely to be more distributed in some unknown proportion between Black and white. This would be the case, e.g., with the large Puerto Rican population in New York City. Thus I have not attempted to compute Latino versus Anglo data for New York and Chicago. Note also that the meaning of differs by locale and that the local terms and are not synonymous with The "white" category in Hawaii includes Portuguese, who, because of their history as plantation labor, are distinguished from haoles in the local ethnic ranking system. The U.S. Census category system does not capture the local construction of race/ethnicity.

Particularly striking is the case of cleaning and building services. This category—which includes maids, housemen, janitors, and cleaners—is prototypically “dirty work.” In Memphis, one out of every twelve Black women (8.2 percent) was in cleaning and building services, and Blacks were 88.1 percent of the women in this occupation. In contrast, only one out of every 200 white women (0.5 percent) was so employed. In Atlanta, 6.6 percent of Black women were in this field—constituting 74.6 percent of the women in these jobs—compared with only 0.7 percent of white women. Similarly, in El Paso, 4.2 percent of Spanish-origin women (versus 0.6 percent of Anglo women) were in cleaning and building services—making up 90.0 percent of the women in this field. And in San Antonio the Spanish and Anglo percentages were 5.3 percent versus 1.1 percent, respectively, with Spanish-origin women 73.5 percent of women in these occupations. Finally, in Honolulu, 4.7 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander women were in these occupations, making up 86.6 percent of the total. Only 1.3 percent of white women were so employed.*

From personal to structural hierarchy

Does a shift from domestic service to low-level service occupations represent progress for racial-ethnic women? At first glance it appears not to bring much improvement. After domestic service, these are the lowest paid of all occupational groupings. In 1986 service workers were nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of workers in the United States earning at or below minimum wage.[†] As in domestic service, the jobs are often part-time and seasonal, offer few or no medical and other benefits, have low rates of unionization, and subject workers to arbitrary supervision. The service worker also often performs in a public setting the same sorts of tasks that servants did in a private setting. Fur-

* Computed from tables specified in *ibid.*

† The federal minimum wage was \$3.35 in 1986. Over a quarter (26.0 percent) of all workers in these service occupations worked at or below this wage. See Mellor (1987, esp. 37).

thermore, established patterns of race/gender domination-subordination are often incorporated into the authority structure of organizations. Traditional gender-race etiquette shapes face-to-face interaction in the workplace. Duke University Hospital in North Carolina from its founding in 1929 adopted paternalistic policies toward its Black employees. Black workers were highly conscious of this, as evidenced by their references to “the plantation system” at Duke (Sacks 1988, 46).[‡]

Still, service workers, especially those who have worked as domestics, are convinced that “public jobs” are preferable to domestic service. They appreciate not being personally subordinate to an individual employer and not having to do “their” dirty work on “their” property. Relations with supervisors and clients are hierarchical, but they are embedded in an impersonal structure governed by more explicit contractual obligations and limits. Also important is the presence of a work group for sociability and support. Workplace culture offers an alternative system of values from that imposed by managers (Benson 1986).[§] Experienced workers socialize newcomers, teaching them how to respond to pressures to speed up work, to negotiate work loads, and to demand respect from superiors. While the isolated domestic finds it difficult to resist demeaning treatment, the peer group in public settings provides backing for individuals to stand up to the boss.

That subordination is usually not as direct and personal in public settings as in the private household does not mean, however, that race and gender hierarchy is diminished in importance. Rather, it changes form, becoming institutionalized within organizational structures. Hierarchy is elaborated through a detailed division of labor that separates conception from execution and allows those

[‡] Paternalism is not limited to southern hospitals; similar policies were in place at Montefiore Hospital in New York City. See Fink and Greenberg (1979).

[§] See also many examples of workplace cultures supporting resistance in Sacks and Remy (1984) and Lamphere (1987).

at the top to control the work process. Ranking is based ostensibly on expertise, education, and formal credentials.

The elaboration is especially marked in technologically oriented organizations that employ large numbers of professionals, as is the case with health care institutions. Visual observation of any hospital reveals the hierarchical race and gender division of labor: at the top are the physicians, setting policy and initiating work for others; they are disproportionately white and male. Directly below, performing medical tasks and patient care as delegated by physicians and enforcing hospital rules, are the registered nurses (RNs), who are overwhelmingly female and disproportionately white. Under the registered nurses and often supervised by them are the licensed practical nurses (LPNs), also female but disproportionately women of color. At about the same level are the technologists and technicians who carry out various tests and procedures and the “administrative service” staff in the offices; these categories tend to be female and white. Finally, at the bottom of the pyramid are the nurse’s aides, predominantly women of color; housekeepers and kitchen workers, overwhelmingly women of color; and orderlies and cleaners, primarily men of color. They constitute the “hands” that perform routine work directed by others.

The racial division of labor in nursing

A study of stratification in the nursing labor force illustrates the race and gender construction of public reproductive labor. At the top in terms of status, authority, and pay are the RNs, graduates of two-, three-, or four-year hospital or college-based programs. Unlike the lower ranks, registered nursing offers a career ladder. Starting as a staff nurse, a hospital RN can rise to head nurse, nursing supervisor, and finally, director of nursing. In 1980 whites were 86.7 percent of RNs even though they were only 76.7 percent of the population. The LPNs, who make up

the second grade of nursing, generally have had twelve months' training in a technical institute or community college. The LPNs are supervised by RNs and may oversee the work of aides. Racial-ethnic workers constituted 23.4 percent of LPNs, with Blacks, who were 11.7 percent of the population, making up fully 17.9 percent. Below the LPNs in the hierarchy are the nurse's aides (NAs), who typically have on-the-job training of four to six weeks. Orderlies, attendants, home health aides, and patient care assistants also fall into this category. These workers perform housekeeping and routine caregiving tasks "delegated by an RN and performed under the direction of an RN or LPN." Among nurse's aides, 34.6 percent were minorities, with Blacks making up 27.0 percent of all aides.*

Nationally, Latinas were underrepresented in health care services but were found in nurse's aide positions in proportion to their numbers-making up 5.2 percent of the total. The lower two grades of nursing labor thus appear to be Black specialties. However, in some localities other women of color are concentrated in these jobs. In San Antonio, 48 percent of aides were Spanish-origin, while only 15.1 percent of the RNs were. Similarly, in El Paso, 61.5 percent of aides were Spanish-origin, compared with 22.8 percent of RNs. In Honolulu, Asian and Pacific Islanders who were 68.6 percent of the female labor force made up 72.3 percent of the NAs but only 45.7 percent of the RNs.†

* American Nurses' Association 1965, 6. Reflecting differences in status and authority, RNs earn 20-40 percent more than LPNs and 60-150 percent more than NAs (U.S. Department of Labor 1987a, 1987b).

† For the national level, see U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984), chap. D, "Detailed Population Characteristics," pt. 1: "United States Summary," table 278. For statistics on RNs and aides in San Antonio, El Paso, and Honolulu, see U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984), chap. D, "Detailed Population Characteristics," pt. 13: "Hawaii"; and pt. 45: "Texas," table 279.

Familial symbolism and the race and gender construction of nursing.

How did the present ranking system and sorting by race/ethnic category in nursing come about? How did the activities of white nurses contribute to the structuring? And how did racial-ethnic women respond to constraints?

The stratification of nursing labor can be traced to the beginnings of organized nursing in the 1870s. However, until the 1930s grading was loose. A broad distinction was made between so-called trained nurses, who were graduates of hospital schools or collegiate programs, and untrained nurses, referred to—often interchangeably—as “practical nurses,” “hospital helpers,” “nursing assistants,” “nursing aides,” or simply as “aides” (Cannings and Lazonik 1975; Reverby 1987).

During this period health work in hospitals was divided between male physicians (patient diagnosis and curing) and female nursing staff (patient care) in a fashion analogous to the separate spheres prescribed for middle-class households. Nurses and physicians each had primary responsibility for and authority within their own spheres, but nurses were subject to the ultimate authority of physicians. The separation gave women power in a way that did not challenge male domination. Eva Gamarinikow likens the position of the British nursing matron to that of an upper-class woman in a Victorian household who supervised a large household staff but was subordinate to her husband (Gamarinikow 1978). Taking the analogy a step further, Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle describe the pre-World War II hospital as operating under a system of controls based on familial symbolism. Physicians were the authoritative father figures, while trained nurses were the mothers overseeing the care of patients, who were viewed as dependent children. Student nurses and practical nurses were, in this scheme, in the position of servants, expected

to follow orders and subject to strict discipline (Game and Pringle 1983, 99-100).

Like the middle-class white housewives who accepted the domestic ideology, white nursing leaders rarely challenged the familial symbolism supporting the gender division of labor in health care. The boldest advocated at most a dual-headed family (Reverby 1987, 71-75). They acceded to the racial implications of the family metaphor as well. If nurses were mothers in a family headed by white men, they had to be white. And, indeed, trained nursing was an almost exclusively white preserve. As Susan Reverby notes, "In 1910 and 1920, for example, less than 3% of the trained nurses in the United States were black, whereas black women made up 17.6% and 24.0% respectively of the female working population" (Reverby 1987, 71-75). The scarcity of Black women is hardly surprising. Nursing schools in the South excluded Blacks altogether, while northern schools maintained strict quotas. Typical was the policy of the New England Hospital for Women and Children, which by charter could only admit "one Negro and one Jewish student" a year (Hine 1989, 6). Black women who managed to become trained nurses did so through separate Black training schools and were usually restricted to serving Black patients, whether in "integrated" hospitals in the North or segregated Black hospitals in the South.^{*} White nursing leaders and administrators justified exclusion by appeals to racist ideology. Anne Bess Feedback, the superintendent of nurses for Henry Grady Hospital in Atlanta, declared that Negro women under her supervision had no morals: "They are such liars

* For accounts of Black women in nursing, see also Hine (1985) and Carnegie (1986). Hine (1989, chap. 7) makes it clear that Black nurses served Black patients not just because they were restricted but because they wanted to meet Black health care needs. Blacks were excluded from membership in two of the main national organizations for nurses, the National League of Nursing Education and the American Nurses' Association. And although they formed their own organizations such as the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses and enjoyed the respect of the Black community, Black nurses remained subordinated within the white-dominated nursing profession.

They shift responsibility whenever they can They quarrel constantly among themselves and will cut up each other's clothes for spite Unless they are constantly watched, they will steal anything in sight" (Hine 1985, 101).

Perhaps the most consistent refrain was that Black women were deficient in the qualities needed to be good nurses: they lacked executive skills, intelligence, strength of character, and the ability to withstand pressure. Thus Margaret Butler, chief nurse in the Chicago City Health Department, contended that Black nurses' techniques were "inferior to that of the white nurses, they are not punctual, and are incapable of analyzing a social situation." Apparently Black nurses did not accept white notions of racial inferiority, for Butler also complains about their tendency "to organize against authority" and "to engage in political intrigue" (Hine 1989, 99). Another white nursing educator, Margaret Bruesche, suggested that although Black women lacked the ability to become trained nurses, they "could fill a great need in the South as a trained attendant, who would work for a lower wage than a fully trained woman" (Hine 1989, 101). Even those white nursing leaders sympathetic to Black aspirations agreed that Black nurses should not be put in supervisory positions because white nurses would never submit to their authority.

Similar ideas about the proper place of "Orientals" in nursing were held by haole nursing leaders in pre-World War II Hawaii. White-run hospitals and clinics recruited haoles from the mainland, especially for senior nurse positions, rather than hiring or promoting locally trained Asian American nurses. This pattern was well known enough for a University of Hawaii researcher to ask a haole health administrator whether it was true that "oriental nurses do not reach the higher positions of the profession?" Mr. "c" confirmed this: "Well, there again it is a matter of qualification. There is a limit to the number of nurses we can produce here. For that reason we have to hire from the mainland. Local

girls cannot compete with the experience of mainland haole girls. In order to induce haole nurses here we could not possibly put them under an oriental nurse because that would make them race conscious right at the start. And as I said before, Japanese don't make good executives.' Because of the racial caste system in Hawaii, Japanese American women who managed to get into nursing were not seen as qualified or competent to do professional work. The chairman of the Territorial Nurses Association noted that "before the war (started), our local nurses were looked down (upon) because they were mostly Japanese The Japanese nurses feel they can get along better with Mainland nurses than local haole nurses. That is true even outside of the profession. I remember hearing a Hawaiian born haole dentist say, 'I was never so shocked as when I saw a white man shine shoes when I first went to the Mainland.' Haoles here feel only orientals and other non-haoles should do menial work.[†]

The systematic grading of nursing labor into three ranks was accomplished in the 1930s and forties as physician-controlled hospital administrations moved to establish "sound business" practices to contain costs and consolidate physician control of health care.^{*} High-tech medical and diagnostic procedures provided an impetus for ever-greater specialization. Hospitals adopted Taylorist principles of "scientific management," separating planning and technical tasks from execution and manual labor. They began to hire thousands of subsidiary workers and created the licensed practical nurse, a position for a graduate of a oneyear technical program, to perform routine housekeeping and patient

* Document Nu21-I, p. 2, Romanzo Adams Research Laboratory papers, A1989-006, box 17, folder 1.

† Document Nu10-I, p. 3, Romanzo Adams Research Laboratory papers, A1989-006, box 17, folder 4.

‡ This was one outcome of the protracted and eventually successful struggle waged by physicians to gain control over all health care. For an account of how physicians established hospitals as the main site for medical treatment and gained authority over "subsidiary" health occupations, see Starr (1982). For accounts of nurses' struggle for autonomy and their incorporation into hospitals, see Reverby (1987) and also Wagner (1980).

care. With fewer discriminatory barriers and shorter training requirements, LPN positions were accessible to women of color who wanted to become nurses.

The lowest level of nursing workers, nurse's aides, also was defined in the 1930s, when the American Red Cross started offering ten-week courses to train aides for hospitals. This category expanded rapidly in the 1940s, doubling from 102,000 workers in 1940 to 212,000 in 1950 (Cannings and Lazonik 1975, 200-201). This occupation seems to have been designed deliberately to make use of African American labor in wake of labor shortages during and after World War II. A 1948 report on nursing told the story of how nurse's aides replaced the heretofore volunteer corps of ward attendants: "In response to this request for persons designated as nursing aides, the hospital discovered among the large Negro community a hitherto untapped reservoir of personnel, well above the ward attendant group in intelligence and personality" (Cannings and Lazonik 1975, 201).

One reason for their superiority can be deduced: they often were overqualified. Barred from entry into better occupations, capable, well educated Black women turned to nurse's aide work as an alternative to domestic service.

In the meantime RNs continued their struggle to achieve professional status by claiming exclusive rights over "skilled" nursing work. Some nurses, especially rank-and-file general duty nurses, called for an outright ban on employing untrained nurses. Many leaders of nursing organizations, however, favored accepting subsidiary workers to perform housekeeping and other routine chores so that graduate nurses would be free for more professional work. Hospital administrators assured RNs that aides would be paid less and assigned non-nursing functions and that only trained nurses would be allowed supervisory roles. One adminis-

trator claimed that aide trainees were told repeatedly that “they are not and will not be nurses” (Reverby 1987, 194).

In the end, the leaders of organized nursing accepted the formal stratification of nursing and turned their attention to circumscribing the education and duties of the lower grades to ensure their differentiation from “professional” nurses. Indeed, an RN arguing for the need to train and license practical nurses and laying out a model curriculum for LPNs warned: “Overtraining can be a serious danger. The practical nurse who has a course of over fifteen months (theory and practice) gets a false impression of her abilities and builds up the unwarranted belief that she can practice as a professional nurse” (Deming 1947, 26). Hospital administrators took advantage of race and class divisions and RNs’ anxieties about their status to further their own agenda. Their strategy of co-opting part of the work force (RNs) and restricting the mobility and wages of another part (LPNs and NAs) undermined solidarity among groups that might otherwise have united around common interests.

Nursing aides: Consciousness of race and gender.

The hierarchy in health care has come to be justified less in terms of family symbolism and more in terms of bureaucratic efficiency. Within the new bureaucratic structures, race and gender ordering is inherent in the job definitions. The nurse’s aide job is defined as unskilled and menial; hence, the women who do it are, too. Nurse’s aides frequently confront a discrepancy, however, between how their jobs are defined (unskilled and subordinate) and what they actually are allowed or expected to do (exercise skill and judgment). Lillian Roberts’s experiences illustrate the disjunction. Assigned to the nursery, she was fortunate to work with a white southern RN who was willing to teach her. “I would ask her about all kinds of deformities that we would see in the nursery, the color of a baby, and why this was happening and why

the other was happening. And then I explored with her using my own analysis of things. Sometimes I'd be right just in observing and putting some common sense into it. Before long, when the interns would come in to examine the babies, I could tell them what was wrong with every baby. I'd have them lined up for them" (Reverby 1979, 297-98).

The expertise Roberts developed through observation, questioning, and deduction was not recognized, however. Thirty years later Roberts still smarts from the injustice of not being allowed to sit in on the shift reports: "They never dignify you with that. Even though it would help you give better care. There were limitations on what I could do" (Reverby 1979, 298-99).

She had to assume a deferential manner when dealing with white medical students and personnel, even those who had much less experience than she had. Sometimes she would be left in charge of the nursery and "I'd get a whole mess of new students in there who didn't know what to do. I would very diplomatically have to direct them, although they resented to hell that I was both black and a nurse's aide. But I had to do it in such a way that they didn't feel I was claiming to know more than they did" (Reverby 1979, 298). One of her biggest frustrations was not being allowed to get on-the-job training to advance. Roberts describes the "box" she was in: "I couldn't have afforded to go to nursing school. I needed the income, and you can't just quit a job and go to school. I was caught in a box, and the salary wasn't big enough to save to go to school. And getting into the nursing schools was a real racist problem as well. So there was a combination of many things. And I used to say, 'Why does this country have to go elsewhere and get people when people like myself want to do something?'" (Reverby 1979, 299). When she became a union organizer, her proudest accomplishment was to set up a program in New York that allowed aides to be trained on the job to become LPNs.

While Roberts's experience working in a hospital was typical in the 1940s and 1950s, today the typical aide is employed in a nursing home, in a convalescent home, or in home health care. In these settings, aides are the primary caregivers.* The demand for their services continues to grow as treatment increasingly shifts out of hospitals and into such settings. Thus, even though aides have lost ground to RNs in hospitals, which have reorganized nursing services to recreate RNs as generalists, aides are expected to remain among the fastest-growing occupations through the end of the century (Sekcenski 1981, 10-16).†

Whatever the setting, aide work continues to be a specialty of race/ethnic women. The work is seen as unskilled and subordinate and thus appropriate to their qualifications and status. This point was brought home to Timothy Diamond during the training course he attended as the sole white male in a mostly Black female group of trainees: "We learned elementary biology and how we were never to do health care without first consulting someone in authority; and we learned not to ask questions but to do as we were told. As one of the students, a black woman from Jamaica used to joke, 'I can't figure out whether they're trying to teach us to be nurses' aides or black women' " (Diamond 1988,40).

What exactly is the nature of the reproductive labor that these largely minority and supposedly unskilled aides and assistants perform? They do most of the day-to-day, face-to-face work of caring for the ill and disabled: helping patients dress or change gowns, taking vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, pulse), assisting patients to shower or giving bed baths, emptying bed-

* For example, it has been estimated that 80 percent of all patient care in nursing homes is provided by nurse's aides (see Coleman 1989, 5). In 1988, 1,559,000 persons were employed as RNs, 423,00 as LPNs, 1,404,00 as nurse's aides, orderlies, and attendants, and 407,000 as health aides (U.S. Department of Labor 1989, table 22). Nurse's aides and home health care aides are expected to be the fastest-growing occupations through the 1990s, according to Silvestri and Lukasiewicz (1987, 59).

† For a description of trends and projections to the year 2000, see Silvestri and Lukasiewicz (1987).

pans or assisting patients to toilet, changing sheets and keeping the area tidy, and feeding patients who cannot feed themselves. There is much “dirty” work, such as cleaning up incontinent patients. Yet there is another, unacknowledged, mental and emotional dimension to the work: listening to the reminiscences of elderly patients to help them hold on to their memory, comforting frightened patients about to undergo surgery, and providing the only human contact some patients get. This caring work is largely invisible, and the skills required to do it are not recognized as real skills.’

That these nurse’s aides are performing reproductive labor on behalf of other women (and ultimately for the benefit of households, industry, and the state) becomes clear when one considers who would do it if paid workers did not. Indeed, we confront that situation frequently today, as hospitals reduce the length of patient stays to cut costs. Patients are released “quicker and sicker” (Sacks 1988, 165). This policy makes sense only if it is assumed that patients have someone to provide interim care, administer medication, prepare meals, and clean for them until they can care for themselves. If such a person exists, most likely it is a woman—a daughter, wife, mother, or sister. She may have to take time off from her job or quit. Her unpaid labor takes the place of the paid work of a nurse’s aide or assistant and saves the hospital labor costs. Her labor is thereby appropriated to ensure profit (Glazer 1988). Thus, the situation of women as unpaid reproductive workers at home is inextricably bound to that of women as paid reproductive workers.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article began with the observation that the racial division of reproductive labor has been overlooked in the separate literatures on race and gender. The distinct exploitation of women of

* Feminists have pointed to the undervaluing of female-typed skills, especially those involved in “caring” work (see Rose 1986).

color and an important source of difference among women have thereby been ignored. How, though, does a historical analysis of the racial division of reproductive labor illuminate the lives of women of color and white women? What are its implications for concerted political action? In order to tackle these questions, we need to address a broader question, namely, how does the analysis advance our understanding of race and gender? Does it take us beyond the additive models I have criticized?

The social construction of race and gender

Tracing how race and gender have been fashioned in one area of women's work helps us understand them as socially constructed systems of relationships—including symbols, normative beliefs, and practices—organized around perceived differences. This understanding is an important counter to the universalizing tendencies in feminist thought. When feminists perceive reproductive labor only as gendered, they imply that domestic labor is identical for all women and that it therefore can be the basis of a common identity of womanhood. By not recognizing the different relationships women have had to such supposedly universal female experiences as motherhood and domesticity, they risk essentializing gender—treating it as static, fixed, eternal, and natural. They fail to take seriously a basic premise of feminist thought, that gender is a social construct.

If race and gender are socially constructed systems, then they must arise at specific moments in particular circumstances and change as these circumstances change. We can study their appearance, variation, and modification over time. I have suggested that one vantage point for looking at their development in the United States is in the changing division of labor in local economies. A key site for the emergence of concepts of gendered and racialized labor has been in regions characterized by dual labor systems.

As subordinate-race women within dual labor systems, African American, Mexican American, and Japanese American women were drawn into domestic service by a combination of economic need, restricted opportunities, and educational and employment tracking mechanisms. Once they were in service, their association with “degraded” labor affirmed their supposed natural inferiority. Although ideologies of “race” and “racial difference” justifying the dual labor system already were in place, specific ideas about racial-ethnic womanhood were invented and enacted in everyday interactions between mistresses and workers. Thus ideologies of race and gender were created and verified in daily life (Fields 1982).

Two fundamental elements in the construction of racial-ethnic womanhood were the notion of inherent traits that suited the women for service and the denial of the women’s identities as wives and mothers in their own right. Employers accepted a cult of domesticity that purported to elevate the status of women as mothers and homemakers, yet they made demands on domestics that hampered them from carrying out these responsibilities in their own households. How could employers maintain such seemingly inconsistent orientations? Racial ideology was critical in resolving the contradiction: it explained why women of color were suited for degrading work. Racial characterizations effectively neutralized the racial-ethnic woman’s womanhood, allowing the mistress to be “unaware” of the domestic’s relationship to her own children and household. The exploitation of racial-ethnic women’s physical, emotional, and mental work for the benefit of white households thus could be rendered invisible in consciousness if not in reality.

With the shift of reproductive labor from household to market, face-to-face hierarchy has been replaced by structural hierarchy. In institutional settings, stratification is built into organizational structures, including lines of authority, job descriptions, rules,

and spatial and temporal segregation. Distance between higher and lower orders is ensured by structural segregation. Indeed, much routine service work is organized to be out of sight: it takes place behind institutional walls where outsiders rarely penetrate (e.g., nursing homes, chronic care facilities), in back rooms (e.g., restaurant kitchens), or at night or other times when occupants are gone (e.g., in office buildings and hotels). Workers may appreciate this time and space segregation because it allows them some autonomy and freedom from demeaning interactions. It also makes them and their work invisible, however. In this situation, more privileged women do not have to acknowledge the workers or to confront the contradiction between shared womanhood and inequality by race and class. Racial ideology is not necessary to explain or justify exploitation, not for lack of racism, but because the justification for inequality does not have to be elaborated in specifically racial terms: instead it can be cast in terms of differences in training, skill, or education.^{*}

Because they are socially constructed, race and gender systems are subject to contestation and struggle. Racial-ethnic women continually have challenged the devaluation of their womanhood. Domestic workers often did so covertly. They learned to dissemble, consciously “putting on an act” while inwardly rejecting their employers’ premises and maintaining a separate identity rooted in their families and communities. As noted earlier, institutional service workers can resist demeaning treatment more openly because they have the support of peers. Minority-race women hospital workers have been in the forefront of labor militancy, staging walkouts and strikes and organizing workplaces. In both domestic service and institutional service work, women have transcended the limitations of their work by focusing on longer-term goals, such as their children’s future.

^{*} That is, the concentration of minority workers in lower-level jobs can be attributed to their lack of “human capital”—qualifications—needed for certain jobs.

Beyond additive models: Race and gender as interlocking systems

As the foregoing examples show, race and gender constructs are inextricably intertwined. Each develops in the context of the other; they cannot be separated. This is important because when we see reproductive labor only as gendered, we extract gender from its context, which includes other interacting systems of power. If we begin with gender separated out, then we have to put race and class back in when we consider women of color and working-class women. We thus end up with an additive model in which white women have only gender and women of color have gender plus race.

The interlock is evident in the case studies of domestic workers and nurse's aides. In the traditional middle-class household, the availability of cheap female domestic labor buttressed white male privilege by perpetuating the concept of reproductive labor as women's work, sustaining the illusion of a protected private sphere for women and displacing conflict away from husband and wife to struggles between housewife and domestic.

The racial division of labor also bolstered the gender division of labor indirectly by offering white women a slightly more privileged position in exchange for accepting domesticity. Expanding on Judith Rollins's notion that white housewives gained an elevated self-identity by casting Black domestics as inferior contrast figures, Phyllis Palmer suggests the dependent position of the middle-class housewife made a contrasting figure necessary. A dualistic conception of women as "good" and "bad," long a part of western cultural tradition, provided ready-made categories for casting white and racial-ethnic women as oppositional figures (Davidoff 1979; Palmer 1990, 11, 137-39). The racial division of reproductive labor served to channel and recast these dualistic conceptions into racialized gender constructs. By providing them

an acceptable self-image, racial constructs gave white housewives a stake in a system that ultimately oppressed them.

The racial division of labor similarly protects white male privilege in institutional settings. White men, after all, still dominate in professional and higher management positions where they benefit from the paid and unpaid services of women. And as in domestic service, conflict between men and women is redirected into clashes among women. This displacement is evident in health care organizations. Because physicians and administrators control the work of other health workers, we would expect the main conflict to be between doctors and nurses over work load, allocation of tasks, wages, and working conditions. The racial division of nursing labor allows some of the tension to be redirected so that friction arises between registered nurses and aides over work assignments and supervision.

In both household and institutional settings, white professional and managerial men are the group most insulated from dirty work and contact with those who do it. White women are frequently the mediators who have to negotiate between white male superiors and racial-ethnic subordinates. Thus race and gender dynamics are played out in a threeway relationship involving white men, white women, and women of color.

Beyond difference: Race and gender as relational constructs

Focusing on the racial division of reproductive labor also uncovers the relational nature of race and gender. By "relational" I mean that each is made up of categories (e.g., male/female, Anglo/Latino) that are positioned, and therefore gain meaning, in relation to each other (Barrett 1987). Power, status, and privilege are axes along which categories are positioned. Thus, to represent race and gender as relationally constructed is to assert that the

experiences of white women and women of color are not just different but connected in systematic ways.

The interdependence is easier to see in the domestic work setting because the two groups of women confront one another face-to-face. That the higher standard of living of one woman is made possible by, and also helps to perpetuate, the other's lower standard of living is clearly evident. In institutional service work the relationship between those who do the dirty work and those who benefit from it is mediated and buffered by institutional structures, so the dependence of one group on the other for its standard of living is not apparent. Nonetheless, interdependence exists, even if white women do not come into actual contact with women of color.*

The notion of relationality also recognizes that white and racial-ethnic women have different standpoints by virtue of their divergent positions. This is an important corrective to feminist theories of gendered thought that posit universal female modes of thinking growing out of common experiences such as domesticity and motherhood. When they portray reproductive labor only as gendered, they assume there is only one standpoint—that of white women. Hence, the activities and experiences of middle-class women become generic “female” experiences and activities, and those of other groups become variant, deviant, or specialized.

In line with recent works on African American, Asian American, and Latina feminist thought, we see that taking the standpoint of women of color gives us a different and more critical perspective on race and gender systems (Garcia 1989; Anzaldúa 1990; Collins 1990.) Domestic workers in particular—because they directly confront the contradictions in their lives and those of their

* Elsa Barkley Brown pointed this out to me in a personal communication.

mistresses—develop an acute consciousness of the interlocking nature of race and gender oppression.

Perhaps a less obvious point is that understanding race and gender as relational systems also illuminates the lives of white American women. White womanhood has been constructed not in isolation but in relation to that of women of color. Therefore, race is integral to white women's gender identities. In addition, seeing variation in racial division of labor across time in different regions gives us a more variegated picture of white middle-class womanhood. White women's lives have been lived in many circumstances; their "gender" has been constructed in relation to varying others, not just to Black women. Conceptualizing white womanhood as monolithically defined in opposition to men or to Black women ignores complexity and variation in the experiences of white women.

Implications for feminist politics

Understanding race and gender as relational, interlocking, socially constructed systems affects how we strategize for change. If race and gender are socially constructed rather than being "real" referents in the material world, then they can be deconstructed and challenged. Feminists have made considerable strides in deconstructing gender; we now need to focus on deconstructing gender and race simultaneously. An initial step in this process is to expose the structures that support the present division of labor and the constructions of race and gender around it.

Seeing race and gender as interlocking systems, however, alerts us to sources of inertia and resistance to change. The discussion of how the racial division of labor reinforced the gender division of labor makes clear that tackling gender hierarchy requires simultaneously addressing race hierarchy. As long as the gender division of labor remains intact, it will be in the short-term interest of white women to support or at least overlook the racial division

of labor because it ensures that the very worst labor is performed by someone else. Yet, as long as white women support the racial division of labor, they will have less impetus to struggle to change the gender division of labor. This quandary is apparent in cities such as Los Angeles, which have witnessed a large influx of immigrant women fleeing violence and poverty in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. These women form a large reserve army of low-wage labor for both domestic service and institutional service work. Anglo women who ordinarily would not be able to afford servants are employing illegal immigrants as maids at below-minimum wages (McConoway 1987). Not only does this practice diffuse pressure for a more equitable sharing of household work but it also recreates race and gender ideologies that justify the subordination of women of color. Having a Latino or Black maid picking up and cleaning after them teaches Anglo children that some people exist primarily to do work that Anglos do not want to do for themselves.

Acknowledging the relational nature of race and gender and therefore the interdependence between groups means that we recognize conflicting interests among women. Two examples illustrate the divergence. With the move into the labor force of all races and classes of women, it is tempting to think that we can find unity around the common problems of "working women." With that in mind, feminist policymakers have called for expanding services to assist employed mothers in such areas as child care and elderly care. We need to ask, Who is going to do the work? Who will benefit from increased services? The historical record suggests that it will be women of color, many of them new immigrants, who will do the work and that it will be middle-class women who will receive the services. Not so coincidentally, public officials seeking to reduce welfare costs are promulgating regulations requiring women on public assistance to work. The needs of employed middle-class women and women on welfare might thus be thought to coincide: the needs of the former for

services might be met by employing the latter to provide the services. The divergence in interest becomes apparent, however, when we consider that employment in service jobs at current wage levels guarantees that their occupants will remain poor. However, raising their wages so that they can actually support themselves and their children at a decent level would mean many middle-class women could not afford these services.

A second example of an issue that at first blush appears to bridge race and ethnic lines is the continuing earnings disparity between men and women. Because occupational segregation, the concentration of women in low-paying, female-dominated occupations, stands as the major obstacle to wage equity, some feminist policymakers have embraced the concept of comparable worth (Hartmann 1985; Acker 1989). This strategy calls for equalizing pay for "male" and "female" jobs requiring similar levels of skill and responsibility, even if differing in content. Comparable worth accepts the validity of a job hierarchy and differential pay based on "real" differences in skills and responsibility. Thus, for example, it attacks the differential between nurses and pharmacists but leaves intact the differential between nurses and nurse's aides. Yet the division between "skilled" and "unskilled" jobs is exactly where the racial division typically falls. To address the problems of women of color service workers would require a fundamental attack on the concept of a hierarchy of worth; it would call for flattening the wage differentials between highest- and lowest-paid ranks. A claim would have to be made for the right of all workers to a living wage, regardless of skill or responsibility.

These examples suggest that forging a political agenda that addresses the universal needs of women is highly problematic not just because women's priorities differ but because gains for some groups may require a corresponding loss of advantage and privilege for others. As the history of the racial division of reproductive labor reveals, conflict and contestation among women over

definitions of womanhood, over work, and over the conditions of family life are part of our legacy as well as the current reality. This does not mean we give up the goal of concerted struggle. It means we give up trying falsely to harmonize women's interests. Appreciating the ways race and gender division of labor creates both hierarchy and interdependence may be a better way to reach an understanding of the interconnectedness of women's lives.

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